The Writing of History: Theories and Practices
History 70200
David Nasaw
Fall, 2011
Mondays, 4:15-6:15

This course has been designed for students of history in all fields. Depending on the fields of the participants, the syllabus below may be altered.

As the major activity in this class will be the reading and discussion of texts, all students are expected to attend and participate in all class sessions.

There will be a few writing assignments during the course of the semester.

The final paper will take the form of a written lecture (of no more than twenty pages) to undergraduate history majors on the impossibility and necessity of writing history.

Some course objectives:
- To interrogate, in myriad and sometimes contradictory ways, the essential questions that confront us as historians:
  - How, if the past is defined by “absence,” by its not being either here or now, can we locate and write about it?
  - What, if any, are the boundaries between fiction and history?
  - What, if any, should be the boundaries between fiction and history?
  - Is historical truth a chimera?
  - What is the historical imagination?

- To foster an acquaintance with selected theoretical perspectives on the research, writing, and interpretation of history.

- To interrogate and historicize the notion of “theory” in history.

- To explore the meaning of the “cultural” in cultural history and the “social” in social history.

- To reconnoiter the territories of historiography.

- To explore together strategies for presenting to undergraduates the problems of and necessity for learning to think like historians.
August 29  Introductions: Why are we here? Where are we going? What is to be Done?

September 12  Let the Critique Begin: Hayden White and Narrative in History

September 19  Before the Flood: In a Time of Innocence
Edward Hallett Carr, What is History. Vintage, 1961

September 26  Where is the Social in Social History, Where is the Culture in Cultural History?
Patrick Joyce, “What is the social in social history?” Past and Present, no. 206 (Feb. 2010

October 3  Memory and History

October 17  Looking Back, All the Way Back
$18.
October 24  **Marxist and Materialist Histories**  
Eric Hobsbawm, *On History*, Preface and chapter 10: “What Do Historians Owe to Karl Marx?”  

October 31  **Gender**  
Chapters 1-7.  

November 7  **Foucault**  

November 14  **Race and Ethnicities**  

**Beyond the Nation State**  
AHR Forum: “Oceans of History.” Articles by Kären Wigen, Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, Alison Games, Matt Matsuda, in *AHR*, June, 2006, pp. 717-780,  

November 21  **Into the Archives**  
November 28 **Writing History**

December 5: **Looking Forward, Maybe**
Dominick LaCapra, “Resisting apocalypse and rethinking history,” in *Manifestoes for History*, 160-178

December 12: **Looking Forward: With Suggestions on How Not to Get Tenure as a Historian**
Joanna Burke, “Foreword”; Keith Jenkins, Sue Morgan, Alun Munslow, “Introduction,” and articles by Joan Scott, Elizabeth Deeds Ermath, Beverley Southgate, Greg Dening, David Harlan, David Lowenthal, and Hayden White, in *Manifestos for History*