

## The Craft of History

Prof. Mira Balberg

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MWF 10 –10.50

Warren LH 2208

Zoom office hours: Mon + Wed 2–3 pm or by appointment

Join URL: <https://ucsd.zoom.us/j/98836162838>

In-person office hours by appointment

### Description and goals

This course invites you to the world of historians and explores the ways in which humans uncover, analyze, and understand the past. In this course we will ask: how is it even possible to get to know the past? How is a coherent historical account created out of bits and pieces? What is historical evidence and how can we know whether it is trustworthy? Why do historians disagree with each other all the time? And what is history even good for? The purpose of this course is to help transform you from *consumers* of history, who receive the historical narratives that others provide for them, into *producers* of history, who can use critical judgement and professional skills to create your own historical accounts and explanations.

In this course, you will:

1. Learn how to read *primary sources* closely and how to analyze and assess historical evidence.
2. Develop skills for finding and evaluating *secondary sources*, and for understanding scholars' historical arguments.
3. Understand the contours of history as an academic discipline and start charting your own path and interests within this discipline.
4. Practice effective, clear, and evidence-based written communication.

### Course format and COVID-19 challenges

There is a great deal of unpredictability and uncertainty in our lives right now, which means that flexibility is the name of the game. For as long as it is possible, this class will meet in person at the designated class time (MWF at 10 am). If circumstances require it, we will switch to a Zoom format at the same time. **Please remain attentive to communication from me over email so that you know if anything changes.**

If you are unable to show up to class in person due to a COVID-19 related situation (you are sick, tested positive, or are isolating due to exposure) please let me know as soon as possible and we will work together on finding a solution that will allow you to keep up with the course. **Under no circumstances should you come to class if you are feeling unwell or tested positive.**

I recognize that it is my duty toward you to be as flexible and accommodating as possible in order to allow you all to succeed in this course under challenging circumstances. *It is your duty to communicate with me openly and in a timely manner so that I know how I can best support you.*

We are currently all required to have masks on at all times while in the classroom, and no eating or drinking is allowed in class. Please comply with this university mandate so there will not be need for disciplinary action in case you defy it.

**Required materials**

The readings and textbooks for the course are all available in PDF form and posted on Canvas on the weekly modules under “readings.”

**Assessment***Preparation and attendance:*

This class is fundamentally a conversation: a conversation amongst ourselves and a conversation between us and the materials we will be reading or watching. Therefore, the class crucially depends on your preparation: you are asked to read the texts assigned for every class so as to be thoroughly ready to engage in conversation about them in class and to make a substantial contribution to the discussion.

Attendance in class is important and is part of your overall participation grade. I fully recognize that it may not always be possible for you to attend class, in which case I ask that you communicate with me and explain the situation. We’ll find a way for you to make up for the class(es) you missed. Classes will be podcasted so that you be able to make up material if you missed it, but it is not possible to complete this course successfully without attending most classes.

*Evaluation:*

You will be evaluated based on five written assignments and five discussion board posts. There is no midterm or final in this course: its purpose is not to teach you information but to help you think critically about the work of historians and to acquire the skills pertinent to this work.

**Assignments.** Elaborate guidelines for the assignments will be given throughout the quarter. Each assignment is designed to help you develop a somewhat different skill and give you hands-on experience with historical research and writing. The assignments are not very long or demanding, but they require some time and thought. Do not hesitate to contact me to talk the assignments over and to get feedback on your work plan – this is what I am here for. I do not, however, read assignment drafts. All assignments will be submitted through Canvas.

**Discussion board posts.** Five times during the quarter there will be a discussion question on the course’s discussion board on Canvas for which you will be asked to post a short response. Your responses will serve as basis for our course discussion the following day. Discussion posts are graded on completion – as long as you wrote something of substance (and didn’t copy from someone/somewhere else), you’ll get full credit.

*Late submission policy:*

You are expected to submit assignments and discussion board posts by the due time. However, I do recognize that sometimes there are challenging circumstances and am willing to be flexible, as long as you:

- Communicate with me *ahead of time* (ideally, at least 24 hours before the due date)
- provide a good enough reason for your request for an extension.
- Propose an alternative due date within a reasonable range.

For late submissions regarding which you didn't communicate with me ahead of time, I reserve the right to deduct points from your grade or not to accept them at all. Either way, I urge you to always communicate with me and work out a solution together.

Exceptions: no extensions are possible on discussion board posts or on assignment 1. Those cannot be submitted after the deadline, because they will be the basis of our class discussion.

**All class assignments and discussion posts must present your own individual work, and any source that you are using must be properly cited. Any suspicion that you have not followed this code of academic integrity will lead to further investigation and potential disciplinary action.**

Finally, in the beginning of the quarter I'll ask you to fill an *onboarding questionnaire* in order to tell me a bit about your experiences with the study of history and your expectations from your history studies at UC San Diego. Completing the questionnaire is worth 2 points of your final grade.

*Assessment outline:*

Submission	% of grade	due
Assignment 1: Micro-history (film reflection)	5%	Week 3
Assignment 2: textual primary source analysis	15%	Week 5
Assignment 3: visual primary source analysis	10%	Week 6
Assignment 4: Secondary source analysis	15%	Week 9
Assignment 5: Evaluation and critical engagement		
• 1: map your interests	5%	Week 8
• 2: Choose an article	5%	Week 10
• 3: Take it from there	15%	Finals week
Attendance, participation, and contribution to discussions	21%	Ongoing
Discussion board posts	7%	Weeks 0, 1, 2, 5, 9
Onboarding questionnaire	2%	Week 0

#### Grade Scale

A+	97–100
A	93–96.9
A-	90–92.9
B+	87–89.9
B	83–86.9
B-	80–82.9
C+	77–79.9
C	73–76.9
C-	70–72.9

D	60–69.9
F	59.9 or under

### ***Students with disabilities***

Students requesting accommodations and services for this course due to a disability or injury must provide a current Authorization for Accommodation (AFA) letter issued by the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD) prior to eligibility for requests. Receipt of AFAs in advance is necessary for appropriate planning for the provision of reasonable accommodations. OSD Academic Liaisons also need to receive current AFA letters if there are any changes to accommodations. For additional information, contact the Office for Students with Disabilities: 858-534-4382; or email: [osd@ucsd.edu](mailto:osd@ucsd.edu). OSD website: <https://osd.ucsd.edu/>

### ***Title IX Statement***

The Office for the Prevention of Harassment and Discrimination (OPHD) is the Title IX Office for UC San Diego and investigates reports of sexual harassment, sexual violence, dating and domestic violence and stalking. You may file a report online with the UC San Diego Office for the Prevention of Harassment and Discrimination (OPHD). For further information about OPHD, please visit <http://ophd.ucsd.edu/>. Or you may call OPHD at 858-534-8298. Please note that University employees (including all faculty and teaching and research assistants), who are not confidential resources, are designated Responsible Employees. Responsible Employees are required to report any incidents of sexual violence or sexual harassment to OPHD.

If you are not ready to file a report, but wish to receive confidential support and advocacy, please contact CARE at SARC: <http://students.ucsd.edu/sponsor/sarc/>. CARE at SARC provides violence prevention education for the entire UCSD campus and offers free and confidential services for students, staff and faculty impacted by sexual assault, relationship violence and stalking. Accessing resources at CARE at SARC will not constitute a report to the University.

## **Course plan**

### **Week 0: Welcome (F 9/24)**

**We will NOT have a class meeting on Friday 9/24.**

**Due by Friday 9/24 at 11:59 PM: fill onboarding questionnaire**

**Due by Sunday 9/26 at 11:59 PM: Write a discussion board post to introduce yourself!**

### **Week I: What is history?**

**Due by Tuesday 9/28 at 11:59 PM: Discussion board post II**

1. ***Introduction to the Craft of History*** (M 9/27)
2. ***Humans in time*** (W 9/29)
  - Discussion board post II: what would you consider ‘a historical event’ in your lifetime, and why?
  - Excerpt from “General Montgomery’s Victory” by Sayvion Liebrecht

**3. What do historians do? (F 10/1)**

- E.H. Carr, “The Historian and His Facts”, in *What is History?* (Random House, 1961), pp.7-30

Week II: What is history good for?

**Due by Sunday 10/3 at 11:59 PM: Discussion board post III**

**4. The history of history (part 1): propaganda and entertainment (M 10/4)**

- Discussion board post III: why is it worthwhile to study history (is it?)
- John H. Arnold, *History: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2000), chapter 2.

**5. What is worth telling, and for whom? (W 10/6)**

- Livy, history of Rome (excerpts)

**6. The history of history (part 2): “how it really was” and beyond (F 10/8)**

- Arnold, *History: A Very Short Introduction*, chapter 3

<https://ucsd.kanopy.com/video/return-martin-guerre>

Week III: What are primary sources?

**Due by Sunday 10/10 at 11:59 PM: Assignment 1 (microhistory/ film reflection)**

**7. Primary sources and the making of history (M 10/11)**

**8. From documents to story (W 10/13)**

- Patricia Crawford and Sara Mendelson, “Sexual Identities in Early Modern England: The Marriage of Two Women in 1680.” *Gender and History* Vol.7 no.3 (1995): 363–377.\*  
\*Read pages 371-374 first.
- Watch: Amy Stanley on “A Stranger in the Shogun’s City”  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5SZlozTZO\\_w&t=526s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5SZlozTZO_w&t=526s)

**9. How to approach primary sources? With what questions, with what expectations? (F 10/15)**

- Arnold, *A Very Short Introduction*, chapter 4
- Pliny’s letter to Trajan

Week IV: The challenges of reading primary sources

**Nothing due this week!**

**10. Rhetorical setting: who, when, why, for whom? (M 10/18)**

- Excerpt from Philo of Alexandria, *The Embassy to Gaius*

**11. Whom to trust? (W 10/20)**

- Suetonius, *Life of the Caligula*
- Watch: *Caligula: Rome's Cruellest Emperor?* | Ancient Rome with Mary Beard | Timeline  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PhiJcedqTjM>

**12. A story from many fragments (F 10/22)**

- Selected primary sources on the Bar Kochva revolt

**Week V: Into the archive!****Due by Thursday 10/28 at 11:59 PM: Discussion board post IV****13. Special collections visit (M 10/25)****14. Beyond written documents (W 10/27)**

- François Georgeon, "Caricatures of women at the end of the Ottoman Empire." *Clio: Women, Gender, History* Vol.48 (2018), 201-218  
Content warning: in this class we will discuss some Antisemitic images. Materials could be disturbing.

**15. History through things (F 10/29)**

- Discussion board post IV: pick an object that you feel represents a certain historical period (past or present) and briefly describe what you think it captures about the period it is from. Please do not choose smartphones.
- Nina Lobanov-Rostovsky, "The Art of Putting Soviet Propaganda on Porcelain Plates," *Apollo: The International Art Magazine*, 25 MAY 2017

**Week VI: What are secondary sources?****Due by Sunday 10/31 at 11:59 PM: Assignment 2 (primary textual source analysis)****16. Historians and histories (M 11/1)**

- Arnold, *A Very Short Introduction*, chapter 5

**17. Reliability and usability of secondary sources (W 11/3)**

- Sam Wineburg, *Why Study History When Its Already on Your Phone*, (University of Chicago Press, 2017), 1–10.
- Prep: look for internet sources on "the battle of Karbala"– and try to rank them by reliability

**Friday 11/5 – no class****Week VII: What is a historical argument?****Due by Sunday 11/7 at 11:59 PM: Assignment 3 (primary visual source analysis)**

**18. Conversations and interventions (M 11/8)**

- Rebecca Jo Plant, “Debunking Mother Love: American Mothers and the Momism Critique in the Mid Twentieth Century.” In *Raising Citizens in the Century of the Child: The United States and German Central Europe in Comparative Perspective* (Berghahn Books, 2010), 122–140.

**19. Retelling the story (W 11/10)**

- Edward Watts, “Christianization.” In *Late Ancient Knowing: Explorations in Intellectual History*, eds. Catherine M. Chin, Moulie Vidas (University of California Press, 2015), 197–217.

**20. History and memory (F 11/12)**

- Watch: David Ikard, “The real story of Rosa Parks — and why we need to confront myths about Black history”  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/david\\_ikard\\_the\\_real\\_story\\_of\\_rosa\\_parks\\_and\\_why\\_we\\_need\\_to\\_confront\\_myths\\_about\\_black\\_history](https://www.ted.com/talks/david_ikard_the_real_story_of_rosa_parks_and_why_we_need_to_confront_myths_about_black_history)

**Week VIII: Methodology and critique/ why and how historians disagree**

**Due by Sunday 11/14 at 11:59 PM: Assignment 5 – stage I**

**Due by Thursday 11/18 at 11:59 PM: Discussion board post V**

**21. Oral histories (M 11/15)**

- William Bauer, “Everybody Worked Back Then”: Oral History, Memory, and Indian Economies in Northern California.” In *Oral History, Community, and Work in the American West*, ed. Jessie L. Embry (University of Arizona Press, 2013), 61–81.  
<https://knit.ucsd.edu/rohpl/>

**22. Silence and violence in the archive (W 11/17)**

- Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts.” *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* Vol. 12 no. 2 (2008): 1–14.
- Leslie M. Harris, “Imperfect Archives and the Historical Imagination.” *The Public Historian* Vol. 36 no. 1 (2014): 77–80.
- <http://www.slaveryinnewyork.org/index.html>  
 Content warning: in this class we will discuss enslavement and racial violence. Materials could be disturbing.

**23. How to fill in the blanks? (F 11/19)**

- Discussion board post V: On what kinds of things, in your view, historians disagree amongst themselves?
- Watch: Excerpts from *Captain Cook: Obsession and Discovery*, episode 4 – Northwest passage (on Media Gallery on Canvas)

**Week IX: Why (and how) Historians disagree**

**Due by Sunday 11/21 at 11:59 PM: Assignment 4 (secondary source analysis)**

**24. Historical debates and their stakes (M 11/22)**

Daniel J. Goldhagen and Christopher R. Browning, *The “Willing Executioners”/ “Ordinary Men” Debate*, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2006 [Selections from the Symposium April 8, 1996].

**Thanksgiving week: no classes on Wednesday and Friday**

**Week X: Choose your own adventure**

**Due by Sunday 11/28 at 11:59 PM: Assignment 5 – stage 2**

**25. Evaluating, questioning, and taking the next steps (M 11/29)**

- Jan Lewis, “The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic.” *William and Mary Quarterly* 44 (1987): 689–721.

**26. Wider horizons: history and other disciplines (W 12/1)**

- Kyle Harper, “The Environmental Fall of the Roman Empire.” *Daedalus* Vol. 145 no. 2 (2016): 101–111.

**27. Advising and consultation time (F 12/3)**

**Finals week: Assignment 5 – stage 3 due Tuesday, December 7 by 11:59 PM**