

**Historical Methods in the Social Sciences**  
SOCI 20568/SOCI 30568  
Winter 2023 Mondays/Wednesdays 3:00-4:20pm  
Instructor: Moira O'Shea

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Office: Social Sciences 317  
Office Hours: By appointment through Canvas calendar

### **Course Description**

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This course is designed to introduce students to the methods, theories, and problems encountered in research utilizing historical methods in the social sciences. The course pairs readings that address theoretical and ethical issues in historical methods—such as for and by whom history is written— with practical instruction in using common sources such as archives, oral histories, newspapers, and non-textual evidence. Drawing from diverse readings across the social sciences, we will examine some of the ways scholars from different fields have approached problems of structure, agency, and method; in the process, we will explore the relationship between theory and methods in our own projects. Throughout the course, students will have the opportunity to practice their skills through hands-on assignments that make use of the materials at University of Chicago and beyond.

Have you ever wondered when the ‘toaster buildings’ on 55<sup>th</sup> Street were built or why there are so many townhouses that seem to be around the same age in Hyde Park? In this class we will explore the massive urban renewal project that began in Hyde Park in the late 1950s that fundamentally changed the neighborhood, listen to oral histories of long-term Hyde Park residents, and think about how to use photographs and other objects in historical research. Through investigations into the materials in Special Collections and the Smart Museum, you will have the opportunity to learn more about the history of Chicago and Hyde Park, gain valuable hands-on experience working with historical materials, and ultimately propose a research project of your own design.

#### *Course Requirements and Assessment:*

**Class participation:** The readings and assignments for this course are necessarily broad. They have been selected to provide a broad introduction to historical methods and to enhance your skills in this research area. The readings fall into the following types: (1) texts that serve as examples of the use of historical methods, and (2) texts that are about the use of historical methods. The discussion and critique of texts is a critical skill both in the classroom and outside it. Through this discussion-based class we will develop our skills in analyzing the contributions of authors and formulating our own arguments and critiques. To create an environment in which this can occur, it is necessary to come to class on time and be ready to ask questions and respond to the readings. I understand that we are living in extraordinary times, and I can only ask that everyone do their best. If you need to be absent from class, please let me know in advance and make a plan to discuss what was missed with a classmate.

Written assignments: You will be asked to complete four written memos over the course of the quarter as well as a final research proposal. Each memo prompts an engagement with a different mode of historical research. Each assignment will be discussed in greater detail in the weeks before it is due. All completed assignments should be emailed directly to me at [moshea@uchicago.edu](mailto:moshea@uchicago.edu). Late assignments will be marked down one half of a letter grade for each day they are late.

Grading will be based on the following factors:

In-class participation, contributions, creativity, and constructiveness	25%
Exercise 1: Analysis of a Primary Document	15%
Exercise 2: Comparative Analysis of a Primary Document	15%
Exercise 3: Reading/Listening to an Oral History Interview	15%
Exercise 4: Exploring an Archive	10%
Final Assignment: Research Proposal	20%

Please familiarize yourself with the University policies on academic honesty and plagiarism. Information about university policies can be found here: <https://studentmanual.uchicago.edu/academic-policies/academic-honesty-plagiarism/>.

For information on correct citation and how to avoid inadvertent plagiarism, please see the library website: [https://guides.lib.uchicago.edu/c.php?g=297265&p=5784497#\\_ftn1](https://guides.lib.uchicago.edu/c.php?g=297265&p=5784497#_ftn1).

For additional help with special collections, please reach out to me or to Catherine Uecker, Head of Special Collections Reader Services, at [cuecker@uchicago.edu](mailto:cuecker@uchicago.edu).

#### *Inclusive Classroom Expectations:*

I am invested in meeting everyone at their current level while also providing an environment that challenges you to learn. Therefore, I will take into consideration how you have progressed over the course of the quarter. You will have two opportunities to consider your own work in the class - how you have engaged with the material and what kinds of skills you have learned. These will occur mid-quarter and at the end of the quarter.

It is my intent that as a class we will strive to create and uphold an environment that supports and affirms diversity in all its forms—including race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, social class, disability status, region/country of origin, and political orientation—and that the range of perspectives that students bring to the class will be considered a resource and a strength. I expect that together we will maintain an environment of respect, mutual dialogue, and non-discrimination.

Any suggestions for improving and promoting a positive and open environment will be appreciated and taken seriously. If there are any circumstances hindering your learning or making our shared learning environment difficult, please let me know.

### *Office hours:*

I encourage you to make an appointment during office hours if you feel it would be helpful. I am always happy to discuss the readings or assignments, issues impacting your work, your interests and goals, or professional plans. If you are unable to schedule a meeting during my regular office hours, please send me an email and we can find another time. To make an appointment during regular office hours, please sign up using the Canvas calendar.

### **Required Texts**

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\*All texts available at the Seminary Co-op Bookstore and library reserves

Ginzburg, Carlo. 1980. *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Gould, Roger V. *Insurgent Identities: Class, Community, and Protest in Paris from 1848 to the Commune*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

Stoler, Ann Laura. *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002. \*also available as an e-book through library reserves on Canvas\*

Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. 2015. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press. \*also available as an e-book through library reserves on Canvas\*

NB: Reading in a methods class demands a slightly different type of engagement with works read as examples of excellent historical scholarship than you might be used to. Here are some questions to keep in mind when you are reading:

- 1) What is the author's project? What is their aim?
- 2) What kinds of historical materials/sources does the author use?
- 3) How are these materials/sources used in creating the argument of the book/article?
- 4) Are there multiple kinds of sources? How does the author weave them together?

### **Schedule**

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#### **Week 1 - Introductions**

Wednesday, January 4th

- No readings for first class
- Think of a potential research project using historical methods and come to class prepared to discuss this idea. You are by no means expected to have a fully thought-out research idea/plan nor will you be expected to stick to this plan for your final research proposal.

#### **Week 2 – Thinking about History and Archives**

Monday, January 9<sup>th</sup> (***Meet in Special Collections at the Reg***)

- Sewell, William. 2010. *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. Chapter 2.
- *Practice: Introduction to archives, preparation for exercise 1*

Wednesday, January 11

- Gould, Roger V. *Insurgent Identities: Class, Community, and Protest in Paris from 1848 to the Commune*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995. Chapters 1-2 and appendix B.
- *Practice: Discussion of exercise 1 – bring printed copies of your materials to class*

**\*\*Exercise 1 due Sunday, January 15th, at 5pm\*\***

### **Week 3 – Identity and Structure**

Monday, January 16<sup>th</sup>

[No class – Martin Luther King, Jr. Day]

Wednesday, January 18<sup>th</sup>

- Gould, Roger V. *Insurgent Identities: Class, Community, and Protest in Paris from 1848 to the Commune*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995. Chapters 3-end.

### **Week 4 – Comparative Methods and Microhistory**

Monday, January 23<sup>rd</sup> (**Meet in Special Collections at the Reg**)

- Ragin, Charles C. 2014. *The Comparative Method: Moving beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies: With a New Introduction*. Oakland, California: University of California Press. Find e-book on library website and read chapters 1-3.
- *Practice: Comparing documents – See exercise 2. In this class we will read a second set of documents and consider how they expand and problematize our understandings of urban renewal gleaned from reading documents in week 3. All students must use the special collections website to request a box for this class. **You must order your box by the end of the day on Thursday, January 19<sup>th</sup> to give Special Collections time to page your item.***

Wednesday, January 25<sup>th</sup>

- Ginzburg, Carlo. 1980. *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. Prefaces and sections 1-27.
- *Practice: Discussion of exercise 2 – bring printed copies of both the original and second source material you chose to class*

**\*\*Exercise 2 Due Sunday, January 29<sup>th</sup>, at 5pm\*\***

### **Week 5 – Microhistory and the Power of the Archive**

Monday, January 30<sup>th</sup>

- Ginzburg, Carlo. 1980. *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. Section 28-end

Wednesday, February 1st

- Skarpelis, A. K. M. 2020. “Life on File: Archival Epistemology and Theory.” *Qualitative Sociology* 43 (3): 385–405. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-020-09460-1>.
- Sahadeo, Jeff. 2005. “‘Without the Past There Is No Future’: Archives, History and Authority in Uzbekistan.” Pp. 45-67 in Antoinette Burton (ed.) *Archive Stories: Facts, Fictions and the Writing of History*. Durham, NC: Duke UP.

## Week 6 – Oral Histories

Monday, February 6th (***Meet in Special Collections at the Reg***)

- Ritchie, Donald A. 2015. *Doing Oral History*. Third edition. Oxford Oral History Series. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. Chapter 1 and Chapter 4 (to p132) \*PDFs on Canvas under library reserves\*
- *Practice: Working with oral histories – introduction to oral histories*

Wednesday, February 8th

- Sarkar, Mahua. 2012. “Between Craft and Method: Meaning and Inter-Subjectivity in Oral History Analysis: Between Craft and Method.” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 25 (4): 578–600. <https://doi.org/10.1111/johs.12000>.
- *Practice: Working with oral histories – annotating transcripts -\*\* exercise 3 part 1 due in class\*\**

**\*\*Exercise 3 (part 2) Due Sunday, February 12<sup>th</sup>, at 5pm\*\***

## Week 7 – Silence and Speech

Monday, February 13th

- Trouillot, Michel-Rolph, and Hazel V. Carby. 2015. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press. Chapters 1-2.

Wednesday, February 15th

- Trouillot, Michel-Rolph, and Hazel V. Carby. 2015. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press. Chapter 3-end.

## Week 8 – Power (objects, categories, and more)

Monday, February 20<sup>th</sup> (***Meet in the Smart Museum***)

- Auslander, Leora. 2005. “Beyond Words.” *The American Historical Review* 110 (4): 1015–45. <https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr.110.4.1015>.
- Olin, Margaret. *Touching Photographs*, University of Chicago Press, 2012. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uchicago/detail.action?docID=997530>. Introduction.

- *Practice: Working with non-textual evidence*

Wednesday, February 22nd

- Stoler, Ann Laura. *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002. Preface and chapters 1-2.

**\*\*Exercise 4 Due Sunday, February 26<sup>th</sup>, at 5pm\*\***

## **Week 9– Power**

Monday, February 27

- Stoler, Ann Laura. *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002. Chapter 3-end

Wednesday, March 1

- Wrapping up – in this class we will discuss your research proposal ideas and what you have taken away from the class as a whole. There is no reading assignment for this class.

**\*\*Final Research Proposals Due Friday, March 10th, at 5pm\*\***

## **At-Home Exercises**

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### *Exercise 1: Analysis of a Primary Document*

In this assignment, you will practice using a text-based primary source using materials from the Hyde Park Historical Society Collection available at the Regenstein Library. You will receive a box of documents from special collections. In class, spend time reading through the documents contained in the folders in your box and choose one to read in detail. Once you have decided on a document, photocopy or scan the document taking care to note the correct citation information for your box and folder. At home, complete the following written assignment and submit by email together with the scan of your document.

Think about your document as a historical source; how, why, and by and for whom was it created; and whether there are omissions that might impact its use in answering scholarly questions. Consider the following questions in a memo of approximately 800-1000 words.

1. Who composed the document and why? How reliable was the writer of the document? What kinds of constraints (institutional, cultural, legal, or otherwise) might they have been writing under? How might these have affected the document? Are there biases in the document? How might we check for them?
2. What was the intended audience for the document? Why do you think it has survived? What does this tell you about the priorities of the archivists who collected this material?
3. What are some of the categories the author uses to organize the concepts in the piece of writing? Are there other ways to organize this material? What does the material and its organization suggest to you about the author?

4. What are the possible uses of this kind of document? Does it tell us directly about the past? Does it provide a window into cultural norms or institutional activities?
5. What are some questions in the historical social sciences that this document might help answer?

### *Exercise 2: Comparative Analysis of a Primary Document*

In this assignment we will consider two documents in comparison. In preparation for this class, you will have to use the finding aid to select a box from the Hyde Park Historical Society Collection and request it through the Special Collections website. In class, you will work with this second box of material. As in the first exercise, spend some time with the documents in your box. Select one to read with and against your document from assignment 1. You should photocopy or scan this document. At home, complete the following written assignment and submit by email together with the scan of your second document.

Compare the two documents keeping your first memo in mind. Consider the two documents in a comparative analysis in a memo of approximately 800-1000 words.

1. What makes these two documents comparable?
2. Are there differences between these documents that call into question certain aspects of each (i.e., are there contradictions or areas of confusion that arise when reading them together)?
3. Does reading them together make you more confident about any of your answers/hypotheses in memo one?
4. In reading these documents together, what new questions might you be able to ask and answer?

### *Exercise 3: Reading/Listening to an Oral History Interview*

As we consider the use of oral histories in historical methods, we will continue to work with the Hyde Park Historical Society Collection. This exercise has two parts.

Part 1 - The first part of the exercise concerns the practice of annotating/coding a transcript of an oral history. In our first visit to Special Collections to work with oral histories you will listen to an oral history and read an accompanying transcript. You should choose 5 pages from the transcript that you would like to work with and acquire a copy of those pages. Read the transcript carefully. Then read the transcript again, preferably several times, and annotate your *copy* of the transcript. Make sure to annotate your transcript in a way that will be legible to another researcher (in this case, to me and your classmates). You should annotate in a way that makes sense to you – there is no one way of annotating a transcript. Bring your annotated transcripts with you to class on November 2<sup>nd</sup>.

Part 2 - For the second part of the exercise, you are to write a memo of 800-1000 words reflecting on oral histories as a method for historical research. This memo will be submitted by email. Think about the interview you have worked with and answer the following questions in a narrative.

1. Think about what insights might be gleaned from this material that point to interesting issues about the time, about contemporary society, about social issues that arise in the interview, etc.
2. Can you tell anything about the interviewer? What can you glean about the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee?
3. What kinds of implicit and explicit understandings or concepts emerge in this interview? Are there any moments when there is a disconnect between the understandings and/or assumptions of the interviewer and interviewee? Why has this happened? How is it resolved?
4. What do you think are the benefits of using oral histories in historical research? Where do you see potential pitfalls or problems?

#### *Exercise 4: Exploring an Archive*

In this assignment you will have to venture beyond the university to explore an archive of your choosing. This exploration is meant to assist you in your next and final assignment: your research proposal. It is expected that parts of this memo will be incorporated into your final research proposal. Think about your research interests and a potential research question that can be answered using historical methods. Where might you look for data outside the university's resources? For this assignment you will have to identify a question and explore an archive/museum/library beyond the university. *I encourage you meet with me at least one week before this assignment is due to discuss possible archives and how to access them. NB: it often takes a while to request materials/gain access to a reading room – START EARLY!* Answer the following questions in a memo of approximately 800-1000 words. Submit the memo together with a copy of the pertinent parts of the finding aid you used by email.

1. What question(s) are you are trying to answer?
2. What archive/museum/library did you choose to explore and why?
3. What did you find? Identify series or boxes from the finding aid of the archive or sections of the library catalogue you thought would be fruitful and discuss the kinds of sources you found there and how they might be useful.
4. Would this archive/museum/library provide sufficient data to answer your question, or would it be necessary to search elsewhere? If so, where else might you look?
5. How easy or difficult was it to access the materials you hoped to access? Reflect on the process of accessing materials and the organization of the materials themselves.

*Some archives/libraries/museums to consider around Chicago:*

Black Metropolis Research Consortium: <https://bmrc.lib.uchicago.edu>

Center for Research Libraries: <https://www.crl.edu>

Newberry Library: <https://www.newberry.org>

Art Institute of Chicago: [https://www.artic.edu/collection/research\\_resources](https://www.artic.edu/collection/research_resources)

Chicago History Museum: <https://www.chicagohistory.org/collections/explore-our-research-collections/>



### *Final Assignment: Research Proposal*

For your final assignment you are create a research proposal for a project that utilizes historical methods. This should be a feasible project, not one that will require many years of archival research abroad or large amounts of funding. Your research proposal should have at least three parts:

- 1) An introduction – What is your question, what is your research puzzle and why is it interesting and important?
- 2) The case – What is the case you have selected and how will it help you to answer your question or figure out your puzzle?
- 3) Data and Methods – This section will be a revised and expanded version of your exercise
4. What methods and data will you use in this project? How accessible is your data, where will you find it? What is out there to find? How will you approach your data?

Project proposals should be ~1,500-2,500 words.