History 400W  
Fall Semester 2012  
Wednesdays, 4:00-6:40

THE HISTORIAN’S CRAFT

**General:** History 400W is the gateway course for the History Major at San Diego State University. Structured principally as a seminar, this course is designed to introduce majors to historical methods, theory, and writing in the discipline of history. To provide further insights to these essentials of the historian’s craft, all sections of History 400W include a “case study” method by focusing on one or more specialized historical fields. The case study for this section of “The Historian’s Craft” is history through film.

Among the topics covered in the course are research methods, bibliography, and citation; modes of historical thinking; uses of evidence, and argumentation, interpretation, and debate within the field of history and, most particularly, in the specialization of history through film.

This course emphasizes how historians arrive at their conclusions as much as what they conclude. Students in this course, then, will be principally concerned with methodologies and sources—how authors conceive of a project and then locate, collect, choose, and use sources to construct a view of the past.

**Student Learning Goals:** Beyond acquiring a basic knowledge of the approaches historians have followed in examining film, students who complete this course are expected to

- interrogate both primary and secondary historical sources within their historical contexts;
- write in a style that is used by professional historians;
- locate primary and secondary research materials;
- use historical empathy as a tool to interpret past human behavior in appropriate historical contexts;
- strengthen critical thinking skills;
- differentiate among several modes of historical writing;
- understand the major historiographical “schools” that influence contemporary historical writing;
- integrate primary and secondary sources to create an effective interpretive essay; and
- understand the relationship between interdisciplinarity and historical discourse.
Required Readings

Four Books for Purchase:


Two Articles Available Electronically through the PAC:


One Article Available Electronically through History 400W “Course Documents” (on Blackboard):


Because the lengths of these readings vary weekly, students should plan their study schedules accordingly. Students are expected to bring the required readings with them to the class for which the readings were assigned.

Course Requirements

This is an extremely demanding course and students must consider at the outset whether they have the time, the energy, the discipline, and the passion that are necessary to satisfy this course’s demanding requirements.

**Informed Class Participation (20%).** Students are expected to have completed all weekly reading assignments and to offer informed opinions about these readings. Class participation also includes students’ oral presentations about writing assignments. Students should be prepared to contribute to discussions, and these will be offered every class meeting.
The instructor will maintain a careful record of how often a student offers thoughtful, insightful, and evidence-based comments about a particular subject under review. The principal criterion used for evaluating a student’s participation is the frequency a student offers oral commentary in ways that enrich the learning experience of all in the seminar. Some students may attempt to dominate class discussions or may discuss subjects that are not germane to that under review. These practices will diminish the quality of the learning experiences of others in the class; accordingly, such practices will not be tolerated, and the participation grade of any student who engages in such practices will be negatively affected.

A student’s participation grade will be derived from a “curve” that will be developed by comparing his/her performance as a participant with that of other students in the class.

Because much of this course has been structured as a seminar, the full participation of every student is of critical importance. Obviously, if a student does not attend every class and required office consultation, he/she will not be able to participate fully. Moreover, attending every class meeting is all the more essential because this class meets only once a week. Therefore, for every unexcused absence, a student’s participation grade will be lowered by a full letter grade for every class and/or required office consultation that is missed (for example, “B” to “C“). Only documented instances of illness or hardship will be considered as excused absences.

**Written Work (80%)**

*Essays (30%).* Several short take-home essays will be assigned throughout the semester. At least one of these essays will be historiographical in nature, and will challenge students to examine the ways historians have offered different interpretations of a particular subject. These essays will be unannounced and will be on topics other than film; the instructor will provide specific guidelines for each of these essays.

*History Through Film Essay (50%).* This essay will on assessing evidence, in this case, feature films as a category of evidence used by professional historians for scholarship. This essay will be in the form of a “case study” that will require students to interpret images of gender and/or race in *Bird of Paradise* (Twentieth Century-Fox, 1951). Students are required to examine these filmic images in two ways: 1) how and why the images conveyed in the 1951 motion picture mirror certain attitudes about gender and/or race in the United States in c. 1951 (in this regard, research materials must include relevant primary and secondary sources as well as notes made from the in-class viewing of the motion picture); and 2) how and why those images represented in the 1951 feature film differ from those represented in the 1932 motion picture of the same title (in this regard, students must draw upon Hershfield’s article [see above under “Required Readings”] and notes students have made from their viewing of the 1932 film). Copies of the 1932 and 1951 motion pictures are on 2-hour loan in the Media Center of the SDSU Library.
This essay should be around ten, double-spaced, machine-produced pages (using 12-point font). Your paper must include an introduction, a conclusion, and a “Works Cited” section. Two copies of the essay must be submitted at 4:00 on December 12.

The history through film essay will be evaluated according to the following criteria: 1) focus/specificity; 2) structure; 3) writing style; 4) originality of subject/approach; 5) quality of sources consulted, and the skills of extracting information from these sources; and 6) citations of sources (following Turabian).

For all citations—appearing in both bibliography and notes—you will need to follow the format that is set forth in the 7th edition of Kate Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007). A summary version of Turabian is the “SDSU Library Chicago Manual of Style Guide” (accessible both through the SDSU Department of History’s and the SDSU Library’s websites). Turabian must also be used for developing the citations in the short essays.

Students are strongly urged to start researching material for developing contexts within which *Bird of Paradise* (1951) will be interpreted. The instructor will provide guidelines early in the semester for researching pertinent primary and secondary sources to develop these interpretive contexts. Because the history through film essay requires students to draw upon the principal elements of the historian’s craft, this essay is the most heavily weighted course requirement.

Students are expected to follow the practices of professional historians by employing formal writing and carefully craft all their written work. Consequently, all written work containing more than two contractions, or two incomplete sentences, or two misspelled words, will be lowered a full letter grade for each occurrence of an additional contraction, or incomplete sentence, or misspelled word. Moreover, all written work (that is, the take-home short essays and the history through film essay) that is submitted late will be severely penalized, and no work will be accepted that has been submitted electronically. Finally, “make-ups” of in-class and take-home assignments will be considered only in cases if documented hardship or illness.

**Computation of Grades**

Letter grades assigned to course work correlate to the following percentages: “A” (100); “A-” (89); “B+” (88); “B” (85); “B-“ (79); “C+” (78); “C” (75); “C-“ (69); “D+” (68); “D” (65); “D-“ (59); and “F” (0). For example, a student who received a “B” on the history through film essay would have earned a percentage of 85 on that assignment; put another way, this student would have earned 42.5 points (85% of 50 possible points) for that assignment. His/her other course work will be calculated in the same manner, yielding a total number of points. The total number of points earned for the entire course will then be correlated to letter grades as follows: “A” (90-100 points), “A-” (89 points), “B+” (88 points), “B” (80-87 points), “B-“ (79 points), “C+” (78 points), “C” (70-77 points), “C-“ (69 points), “D+” (68 points), “D” (60-67 points), “D-“ (59 points), “F” (58 points and below).
Protocol

A classroom must provide an environment that fosters the assimilation of knowledge and the civilized exchange of ideas. Most students attend a class because they genuinely wish to learn a particular subject. Unfortunately, some students do not have this seriousness of purpose and demonstrate their disrespect for the learning experience by engaging in disruptive classroom behavior. Of course, disruptions of any kind are disturbing to instructors and serious students alike. Accordingly, any form of behavior deemed by the instructor to be disruptive will not be tolerated. The instructor will advise a student once that his/her behavior is disruptive; the first time this disruptive behavior is repeated, the matter will be turned over to the University’s Center for Students Rights and Responsibilities for appropriate disciplinary action.

Cheating in any form (which includes plagiarism [for the University’s formal definition of plagiarism, refer to the 2012/2013 San Diego State University General Catalog]) comprises a grave offense. Cheating will not be tolerated, and evidence of cheating by a student will result in an automatic “F” as that student’s course grade. Any evidence of cheating will also be promptly reported to the Center for Students Rights and Responsibilities.

All students are expected to adhere to the “Standards for Student Conduct” as described on the home page of the Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities (csrr.sdsu.edu).

Students are held responsible for all material covered in class (lectures, discussions, slides, videos, DVDs) even if they are not in attendance for whatever reason. Pagers, cell phones, and text-messaging devices must be turned off during the class period.

Changes to the Syllabus

The instructor reserves the right to make changes to this syllabus as he considers appropriate. Whether these changes are given by the instructor orally or in writing, they must be considered as binding course requirements. If you need to contact the professor for missed class announcements, please do so during his office hours.

Pertinent Administrative Information

Instructor: S.A. Colston. Office: Arts & Letters Building, Room 528. Telephone: 594-4716 (voice mail). E-mail: colston@mail.sdsu.edu Office Hours: Wednesdays and Thursdays, 2:45-3:45. No appointments are necessary. In addition, following students’ progress reports on the history-thorough-film essays on Weeks 12, 14, and 15, the instructor will be available for office consultations during the remainder of those seminar periods. Department of History Office (Arts & Letters Building, Room 588; 594-5262). The instructor will return E-mail and voice mail messages only during regular office hours.
COURSE OUTLINE

Class Meetings

1  (August 29)  
   Introduction to course.

2  (September 5)  
   The fundamental steps to starting a writing project. Reading assignment: Storey, Preface, Introduction, and Chapter 1.

3  (September 12)  
   The nature of sources. Locating sources and source criticism. Reading assignment: Storey, Chapters 2 and 4.

4  (September 19)  
   Documenting historical sources. Reading assignment: Turabian (skim entire book, but carefully read Chapters 8-11 and 14).

5  (September 26)  
   The basics of historical writing (I). Reading assignment: Storey, Chapters 3, 5, 6

6  (October 3)  
   The basics of historical writing (II). Reading assignment: Storey, Chapters 7-9.

7  (October 10)  
   The historian as detective: the case of the Codex Cardona. Reading assignment: Bauer (all).

8  (October 17)  
   History through film as interdisciplinary history (I). Reading assignment: Toplin (electronic resource); Francaviglia and Rodnitzky (chapters by Rollins, Rosenstone, and Pingree).

9  (October 24)  
   History through film as interdisciplinary history (II). Reading assignment: Francaviglia and Rodnitzky (chapters by Francaviglia, Nathan/Berg/Klemyk); Colston, “Celluloid Conquistadors” (under Blackboard “Course Documents”).

10 (October 31)  
   In-class viewing of Bird of Paradise (1932). Reading assignment: Hershfield (electronic resource).
11 (November 7)
In-class viewing of *Bird of Paradise* (1951).

12 (November 14)
Progress reports on the history through film essays to the seminar. Discussion.

13 (November 21)
Office consultations about history through film essays with the instructor (required).

14 (November 28)
Progress reports on the history through film essays to the seminar. Discussion.

15 (December 5)
Final progress reports on the history through film essays to the seminar.
Discussion. Time

December 12, 4:00: History through film essays (two copies) are due in class. Oral summations of polished essays. Discussion. Late papers will be penalized, and no late papers will be accepted that are submitted electronically or that are submitted after 4:30.