

This syllabus is a guide, not a contract. It is subject to change.

HISTORICAL STUDIES: Theory and Practice

WORKSHOP: American Disasters

LECTURES: Mondays 9:30-10:45

WORKSHOP: Thursdays 2:00-5:00

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course introduces new majors to the study of history at the university level, as a *scholarly discipline*. Its goal is to familiarize you with the problems and practices involved in the interpretation and writing of history. By the end of the semester you should be able to critically evaluate interpretations rather than simply memorize them, and you should be prepared to deploy secondary and primary sources to make historical arguments of your own.

This is a unique course. Each week is divided into two complementary parts. The **Lecture** component introduces the general issues for the week, and the **Workshop** is where the general issues raised in the lecture will be explored in greater specificity and depth in a field of historical inquiry you selected through readings and discussions.

Your major assignment will be focused on the **Workshop**. It will be the formulation of a research project of your own. This project, which you will design on the basis of preliminary research but not actually write) will enable you to demonstrate your understanding of historical questions, sources, scholarship, and arguments. All the lectures, readings, discussions and assignments have been designed to help you develop this project. Once you complete this assignment, you will be prepared to proceed to—and succeed in—the more advanced colloquia and seminars that constitute the heart of the history major at NYU.

From the 1631 Boston fire that led to North America's first recorded smoking ban, to the earthquakes, tornados, hurricanes fires and floods of the summer of 2011, disasters (sometimes violently) reshape the lives, politics, societies and spaces they strike. This workshop explores the relationship between "natural" events like storms and earthquakes; biological crises like epidemics; and man-made catastrophes like the sinking of the Titanic. Students will investigate the ways in which disasters are understood at different historical moments, how people place blame for disasters, and how disrupted environments are rebuilt. The class will be taught as a series of case studies, investigating particularly destructive, expensive and deadly disasters from the seventeenth century to the present. This approach introduces students to the history of particular kinds of disaster events. It also provides opportunities to discuss the different approaches that historians have taken when discussing individual disasters, or types of disaster.

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EVALUATION

Attendance and participation	20%
Core Assignments	20%
Skills assignments	15%
Midterm	15%
Research Proposal	30%

You cannot pass the class unless you pass each of these categories.

EXPECTATIONS AND RULES

Attendance:

In this course, your learning depends upon your participation. Attendance is therefore expected at all lectures and workshops. You are permitted one unexcused absence from the workshop; beyond that, advance notice and a valid reason for missing class are required. In some cases, documentation will also be required. More than one absence may impact your final grade, and more than two will certainly impact your final grade. No student with five absences from Workshop will pass the course. Regardless of your reason for missing a class, you will be responsible for the material covered that day.

During the course of the semester at the lecture meetings there will be occasional unannounced writing exercises during the class meeting. These exercises are designed to reward attendance and participation, and they count toward your participation credit. They cannot be made up.

These policies take effect with the first workshop and lecture meetings, regardless of when you begin attending the course. For example, if the first time you attend the workshop or lecture is during the second week of classes, you will have already been marked absent from one workshop meeting and you will have missed the lecture's writing assignment.

Participation:

An essential component of the craft of history is expressing yourself clearly through a variety of media. In consequence, your success in this workshop will depend on your regular, informed and thoughtful participation in through discussion, writing and blog posts. In order to participate fully you *must* have completed all of each week's reading. Come prepared.

All students are expected to speak at least once during each class meeting, to productively and thoughtfully reflect on readings in in-class writing assignments, to post at least five times to the class blog, and to come to class prepared with discussion questions at least twice during the semester.

I understand that speaking in class can be a stressful or daunting experience for some students, so I expect that everyone contribute to making the classroom a comfortable and

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respectful intellectual environment in which everyone can participate. If you have anxiety about public speaking, please arrange a meeting with me ASAP. If you have any sort of disability that may affect your ability to carry out assigned course work, I encourage you to contact the staff in the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (212 998-4980) to explore what accommodations are necessary and appropriate. All information and documentation of disability will be kept confidential.

Computers:

Computers in class are discouraged. Note taking is a matter of intellectual engagement, not transcribing lectures.

Additionally, the click-click of typing is a distraction for other students, so students using computers should sit together, at the front of the classroom. Anyone who engages in electronic communications or entertainment of any kind during lecture (texting, phone calls, emailing, Facebook web browsing, or games) will be regarded as absent. After one warning, you will not be allowed to bring your computer to class any more.

Writing guidelines:

You are expected to master the citation style that is common among historians. This style is known as Chicago Style, and it is detailed in the required volume by Kate Turabian. You are encouraged to keep this reference book through your time at NYU, as these policies are generally common throughout history courses.

Good writing is central to history, which mostly takes the form of narratives, whether written form or in film. That includes the questions of form noted in the paragraph above, and it certainly concerns good grammar. But most of all historical writing differs from other academic disciplines by its concern for style. Generally history is written in a plain style, not flowery writing with an excess of verbiage. Good writing is clear and succinct with the argument clear. A very little book by William Strunk and E.B. White, *The Elements of Style* is generally accepted as the best available guide to such writing. Purchase this book and read it carefully, especially the second chapter, on "Elementary Principles of Composition."

Late papers lose 1/3 of a grade per day. E.g., a B paper submitted the morning after it was due, will receive a B-. Papers more than 72 hours late will receive an F.

For help with writing, please visit the Writing Center at 411 Lafayette St, 3rd Floor, New York, NY 10003. Telephone: 212 998-8866 Email: writingcenter@nyu.edu. Hours: Monday to Thursday, 10 am to 8 pm; Friday, 11 am to 4 pm. To schedule an appointment online, go to http://www.nyu.edu/cas/ewp/html/writing_center.html

I am happy to look at drafts, but in order to get my comments you must come to meet with me in person. For core and skills assignments, I will look at drafts sent to be by the **WEDNESDAY** before the assignment is due, and meet with you during my normal office hours. For the final paper, I will look at drafts sent to be by the **MONDAY** before the paper is due, and meet with you during my normal office hours, or by appointment.

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Core and skills assignments:

There are seven core and skills assignments over the course of the semester. These assignments are designed to introduce you to the practice of history, and to help build a body of work towards your final paper. **All skills and core assignments are due at 2pm on Wednesday.** You must submit them to me via e-mail, and post them on the course blog (americandisasters101.wordpress.com password: HIST-UA101). You are expected to review other students' submissions before class, and be prepared to comment on your peers' approaches to the assignments.

You will be allowed one re-write on each of the core assignments, but in order to do so you must meet with me to discuss improvement. Re-writes are not compulsory.

Final paper:

The final paper will take the form of a research prospectus. Details will be distributed in workshop.

Sometime during office hours in weeks 6 and 7, you *must* meet with me to discuss your topic.

Contact and office hours:

I encourage you to come by office hours to check in at least once during the term – feel free to discuss concerns or drafts, or to ask questions about things we have covered in class. While drop-ins are welcome, I'd prefer if you schedule an appointment with me via Google calendar. Instructions for making an appointment can be found on the workshop's Blackboard site.

I can be reached by e-mail during normal business hours (9-5, m-f). Do not expect speedy responses outside of those times, and please allow 24 hours for a response.

Academic honesty:

Intellectual integrity is the university's most fundamental commitment. Plagiarism of any kind will be penalized to the fullest possible extent. There is no mitigating circumstance, ever, for plagiarism.

Whenever you draw upon somebody else's words *or ideas* to make a point, give them credit in a footnote. The most common causes of plagiarism are not deliberate dishonesty. Often it is careless note-taking. Make sure that in your notes you distinguish clearly your thoughts on the reading and the words you have copied from a secondary source. Waiting too long to do the research and the stress and confusion that may result from that rush to finish may produce mistakes that in public represent the most serious violation of academic values. You are, therefore, strongly encouraged to start assignments well in advance of the deadline. If you are uncertain about how to deal with a question of fair credit, ask the lecture teacher or the Workshop teacher. New York University's Policy on academic ethics is posted at <http://cas.nyu.edu/page/ug.academicintegrity>.

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TEXTS

Required Texts:

The following required items are available for purchase at the NYU bookstore or online (but make sure you have the edition indicated below)

- Steven Biel, *American disasters* (New York: New York University Press, 2001).
- Mary Lynn Rampolla, *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History*, 6th edition (New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2010)
- Erik Larson, *Isaac's Storm: A Man, a Time, and the Deadliest Hurricane in History* (Vintage, 2000).
- David G. McCullough, *The Johnstown flood* (Simon and Schuster, 1987)
- William Strunk and E.B. White, *The Elements of Style: 50th Anniversary Edition* (New York: Longman, 2008).
- Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 7th ed. (University of Chicago Press, 2007)

Suggested Texts/ Additional Readings:

The following items are good general texts, but the selected pages will also be available on Blackboard. Items marked with [B] are available on Blackboard. Items marked with [J] are available through JSTOR. It is your responsibility to locate all readings.

- John L. Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002)
- Gregory Squires and Chester Hartman, *There is No Such Thing as a Natural Disaster: Race, Class, and Katrina* (Routledge, 2006)
- Theodore Steinberg, *Acts of God: the unnatural history of natural disaster in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press US, 2006).

SCHEDULE

PART I: HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

WEEK 1

January 23rd – Introduction to the Course; How the Course Works; Reasons to Study History

January 26th – Historians, disasters, and disastrous history

- Selected articles on disasters during the summer of 2011 [B]
- Bergman, J. "Disaster: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis." *History Compass* 6, no. 3 (2008): 934–946. [B]

Focus Question: *What approaches can historians take to studying disasters?*

WEEK 2

January 30th – Historical Explanations: Narrative and Non-Narrative

- John Lewis Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past* (2002), 1-34. [B]

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Skills Assignment #1: Write 400-500 words on the key idea(s) in Gaddis, *The Landscape of History*. **Due at 2 pm on Wednesday, February 1st.**

February 2nd - Assessing disaster

- Kenneth Hewitt, *Regions of risk: A geographical introduction to disasters* (1997). Introduction pp. 1-16 [B]
- Steven Biel, *American Disasters* (New York: New York University Press, 2001). Introduction, pp. 1-10
- Mike Davis, *Ecology of fear: Los Angeles and the imagination of disaster* (Vintage Books, 1999), chap. 1. pp 3-56 [B]

Focus Question: *Is disaster history suited to telling some stories better than others?*

WEEK 3

February 7th – Historical Questions; or Thinking Like a Historian

- Mary Lynn Rampolla, *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History* (2010), 1-4, 68-73



Library scavenger hunt worksheet. **Due in workshop.**

February 9th – Constructing disaster

- Matthew Mulcahy. “A Tempestuous Spirit Called Hurri Cano”: Hurricanes and Colonial Society in the British Greater Caribbean.’ in *American Disasters*, pp. 11-38
- C. S. Smith, ““Faith and doubt: the imaginative dimensions of the Great Chicago Fire,”” in *American Disasters*, 129–169.
- Henry M. McKiven, “The Political Construction of a Natural Disaster: The Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1853.” *The Journal of American History* Vol. 94, No. 3 (December 2007): 734-742.


Focus Question: *What do historians mean when they say that disasters are “constructed”?*

WEEK 4

February 13th – Historical Controversy: Slavery and Racism, which came first?

- Oscar and Mary Handlin, “Origins of the Southern Labor System,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 7 (1950), 199-22. [J]
- Carl Degler, “Slavery and the Genesis of American Race Prejudice,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 2 (1959), 49-66. [J]

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 Core Assignment # 1: In 400 to 500 words develop two historical questions, ones that might be the focus of your final project. See Core Assignment #1 on Blackboard for instructions. **Due at 2 pm on Wednesday, February 15th.**

February 16th - The Dust Bowl and placing blame

- Clayton R. Koppes. "Dusty Volumes: Environmental Disaster and Economic Collapse in the 1930s." *Reviews in American History*. Vol. 8, No. 4 (December 1980), pp. 535-540 [J]
- William Cronon, "A Place for Stories: Nature, History and Narrative." *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 78, No. 4 (March 1992), pp. 1347-1376 [J]

Focus Question: *How "natural" are natural disasters?*

WEEK 5

February 20th - No lecture.

February 23rd - Archive Visit

Meet in Tamiment Library for workshop session.

Tamiment Library, Bobst, 10th floor


- *The Triangle Fire* online at <http://video.pbs.org/video/1817898383> (link on Blackboard site)

Focus Question: *What kinds of evidence can we use to investigate the history of disaster?*

WEEK 6

February 27th - Historical Sources

- Martin Luther King, Speech at Riverside Church, New York City, April 4, 1967 (Distributed in Lecture and discussed in Lecture class)

 Skills assignment #2: In 400 to 500 words analyze, George A. Soper's "The Curious Career of Typhoid Mary" in *The Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine*, Vol. 15, No. 10 (October 1939), paying particular attention to audience and context. **Due at 2 pm on Wednesday, February 29th.**

March 1st - Typhoid Mary

- Leavitt, Judith Walzer. *Typhoid Mary: Captive to the Public's Health*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), excerpts

Focus Question: *How might the same evidence be used to tell different stories?*

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WEEK 7

March 5th - Academic Integrity and Professional Standards; The Case of Arming America; The Work of the Footnote

- Mary Lynn Rampolla, *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History* (2010), 86-132.

March 8th - Fiction, historical fiction and history

- Review of *Isaac's Storm* in *Salon* [B]
- Patricia Bellis Bixel, "'It Must Be Made Safe': Galveston, Texas and the 1900 Story," in *American Disasters*. pp. 223-246 [B]
- Erik Larson, *Isaac's Storm: A Man, a Time, and the Deadliest Hurricane in History* (Vintage, 2000). Excerpts

Focus Question: *When (if ever) can "imaginative" history be useful?*



Bring 1 paragraph description of final paper topic to workshop on **Thursday, March 8th**.

Spring Break - March 12-16

PART II: HISTORICAL APPROACHES

WEEK 8

March 19th - Varieties of environmental history

- Interview with Karl Appuhn.
- Workshop example: The history of food.
- Readings: Ted Steinberg, "Down to Earth: Nature, Agency, and Power in History," *American Historical Review*, 107 (June, 2002) pp. 798-820 [J]



Skills assignment #3: Annotated bibliography. **Due at 12:30 pm on Tuesday, March 20th**.

March 22 - Climate and disaster

- David W. Stahle, et al., "The Lost Colony and Jamestown Droughts," *Science*, 280 (1998), 564-67 [B]
- Karen Ordahl Kupperman, "Fear of Hot Climates in the Anglo-American Colonial Experience," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., LI (1984), 213-240. [B]
- Supplementary reading [B]

Focus Question: *How can a broad comparative perspective help us to better understand individual disasters?*


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WEEK 9

March 26th - Midterm (in lecture section)

March 29th


Midterm discussion and library session. Meet in Bobst PC lab 2.

 In preparation for our library session. Write down, and bring to class with you a list of primary source types that you might possibly use for your final project. Be prepared to introduce your final project in a sentence or two. **Due in workshop on Thursday, March 29th.**

WEEK 10

April 2nd – Social History

- Interview with Ada Ferrer.
- Workshop example: Cultural exchange in African diaspora history
- Readings: Laurent Dubois, “An Enslaved Enlightenment: Rethinking the Intellectual History of the French Atlantic.” *Social History*, 31 (February, 2006) pp. 1-14 [J]

 Core Assignment #2: Book review of one or two secondary sources, one of which need not be one of the assigned readings. See Core Assignment #2 explanation on Blackboard. **Due at 2 pm on Wednesday, April 4rd.**

April 5th - Sinking ships


- Steven Biel. “Unknown and Unsung”: Feminist, African American and Radical Responses to the *Titanic* Disaster.’ In *American Disasters*, pp. 205-240
- Andrea Broomfield. “The Night the Good Ship Went Down: Three Fateful Dinners Aboard the Titanic” in *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (Fall, 2009) pp. 32-42 [J]

Focus Question: *(How) Can historians represent the experiences of disaster victims?*

WEEK 11

April 9th – Gender and Sexuality

- Interview with Linda Gordon during lecture.
- Workshop example: Empire in the 19th and 20th centuries
- Readings: Linda Gordon, “U.S. Women’s History,” in Eric Foner, ed. *The New American History*. (2nd ed.) pp. 257-278

 Skills Assignment #4: Write an analysis of one primary source for your final project. **Due at 2 pm on Wednesday, April 11th**

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April 12th - Gendering Katrina

- Preface and summary of findings in *Katrina and the Women of New Orleans* (2008) found at <http://www.womenscolleges.org/files/pdfs/NCCROWreport08.pdf>
- Shirley Laska, Betty Hearn Morrow, Beth Willinger and Nancy Mock. "Gender and Disasters: Theoretical Considerations." in *Katrina and the Women of New Orleans*.
- Charlotte D'Ooge. "Queer Katrina: Gender and Sexual Orientation Matters in the Aftermath of the Disaster" in *Katrina and the Women of New Orleans*. Alvis A. Jones
- DeWeever and Heidi Hartmann, "Abandoned Before the Storms: The Glaring Disaster of Gender, Race and Class Disparities in the Gulf." In Gregory Squires and Chester Hartman, *There is No Such Thing as a Natural Disaster: Race, Class, and Katrina* (Routledge, 2006). pp. 85-102 [B]

Focus Question: *What is the link between gender, gender equality and disaster risk?*

WEEK 12

April 16th - Microhistory

- Interview with Martha Hodes during lecture.
- Workshop example: American disasters
- Martha Hodes, "Four Episodes in Re-creating a life," *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice*, 10 (2006), pp. 277-90. [B]

April 19th - The Johnstown Flood

- David G. McCullough, *The Johnstown flood* (Simon and Schuster, 1987). Entire

Focus Question: *Must (should) the history of individual disasters be microhistory?*

WEEK 13

April 23rd - Transnational History

- Interview with Andrew Sartori during lecture.
- Workshop example: Mass media and culture in 20th century Europe.
- Sebastian Conrad, *Globalisation and the Nation in Imperial Germany* (2010), pp. 1-11, 15-21 [B]



Core Assignment #3: Historiography Review. (600 to 700 words) Write an essay in which you explore the scholarship that has been done on your chosen research proposal topic. Place the writings of different scholars in conversation with each other and to your historical question. Be sure to articulate a clear argument for what you see as successful or unsuccessful approaches to the topic. **Due at 2 pm on Wednesday, April 25th.**

April 26th - Vectors of disease

- Alan Kraut. *When Germs Travel*. Introduction, Chapter 1, Chapter 2 [B]

Focus Question: *In what ways are histories told from a broad geographical perspectives different from microhistories? In what ways are they similar?*

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PART III: CRAFTING YOUR PROPOSAL

WEEK 14

April 30th – Peer review of drafts


 Rough draft due by e-mail. **Due Monday, April 30th, by 8 am.**

 Peer review write-up due by e-mail. **Due Thursday, May 3rd by 8 am.**

May 3rd – Individual meetings

WEEK 15

May 7th – Presentation of projects in class

 Final Assignment: Research prospectus. **Due Saturday, May 12th by midnight.**