

**History 4300**  
**MICROHISTORIES OF MODERN EUROPE**

**Dr. Steven Soper**  
**Fall Term 2008**  
**MWF, 9:05-9:55**  
**LeConte 101**

**Office: LeConte 128**  
**Office Hours: W, 10:00-11:00 a.m.**  
**and by appointment**  
**Email: ssoper@uga.edu**

A doctor and his patients in provincial Germany (1721-1740)...The abduction of a six-year-old Jewish boy in Bologna, Italy (1858)...Violent murder and rumors of cannibalism in rural France (1870)...A Nazi police battalion with orders to execute entire villages of Jews in Poland (1942-1943).

These are all examples of the genre of historical research and writing known as microhistory, which uses very specific (“micro-“) topics and archival sources to examine larger historical problems. Thus, the four microhistories described above address, respectively, changing conceptions of women’s bodies, the history of the papacy and Italian unification, the political culture of French peasants, and the social psychology of genocide in Nazi Germany.

The focus of this course will be a close reading of a wide range of modern European microhistories. But we will also examine the genre’s theoretical and methodological connections both to other scholarly disciplines – in particular, cultural anthropology – and to other genres of history, including local history and the history of everyday life.

**Textbooks**

The following books are required for the course:

Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983).

Barbara Duden, *The Woman Beneath the Skin: A Doctor’s Patients in Eighteenth-Century Germany*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991).

Robert Harms, *The Diligent: A Voyage Through the Worlds of the Slave Trade* (New York: Basic Books, 2001)

Susanna Kaysen, *Girl, Interrupted* (New York: Vintage, 1993).

David I. Kertzer, *The Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara* (New York: Beacon Press, 1997).

Steven Johnson, *The Ghost Map: The Story of London’s Most Terrifying Epidemic – and How It Changed Science, Cities, and the Modern World* (New York: Riverhead Trade, 2007).

Alain Corbin, *The Village of Cannibals: Rage and Murder in France, 1870*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992).

Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998).

Timothy Garton Ash, *The File: A Personal History* (New York: Vintage, 1998).

**Coursepacks**

Two coursepacks of readings, available at Bel-Jean Copy/Print Center (163 E. Broad St.), are also required for the course.

## Course Requirements

*Discussion Questions and Class Participation.* This is a seminar, not a lecture class, which means that most of our class time will be spent discussing the assigned readings, as a group. I will always come to class with a set of my own discussion questions and ideas; however, our discussions will typically begin with your questions, not mine. Early in the semester, you will sign up for three separate discussion dates (one for each third of the semester): on each of these dates, you must come to class with a) one discussion question, which you should write on the blackboard before class begins; and b) a 3-page (typed, double-spaced) answer to your own discussion question, which I will collect and grade (“good,” “fair,” or “poor”). **No handwritten, emailed, or late assignments will be accepted.** Specifically, I will determine your participation grade as follows:

- A = Regularly contributes to discussions; rarely absent; good discussion questions.
- B = Often contributes to discussions; rarely absent; fair discussion questions.
- C = Occasionally contributes to discussions; rarely absent; fair discussion questions.
- D = Rarely contributes to discussions OR often absent; fair to poor discussion questions.
- F = Rarely contributes to discussions AND often absent; poor discussion questions.

*First Essay.* In a 6-page (typed, double-spaced) essay, use Barbara Duden’s book, *The Woman Beneath the Skin*, to explain the methods and aims of microhistory. This essay will be due on **Friday, Sept. 12.**

*Second Essay.* You will write an 8-page (typed, double-spaced) essay discussing the role of print media in Kertzer’s *The Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara*, Johnson’s *The Ghost Map*, and Corbin’s *Village of Cannibals*. This essay will be due on **Monday, Nov. 3.**

*Third Essay.* For your final essay, I want you to think about how the concerns and methods of microhistory might be applied to a new historical topic. I do not expect you to become an instant expert on a specific topic, or to write a microhistory of your own; rather, the goal is to explore what Giovanni Levi calls the “experimental purposes” of microhistorical thinking. To give you an idea of what I want you to do, I will present a sample research project on microhistories of jazz in America on Wed. and Fri., Sept. 24 and 26. **Note:** As this example suggests, for this project you may address topics in areas other than modern Europe. As part of this project, you are required to prepare a **10-minute oral presentation** of your ideas, and an **8-page** (typed, double-spaced) **summary of your ideas and research**, which is **due the day of your presentation.**

**Note:** I expect every student to observe the University’s academic honesty policy, which can be consulted on the internet at: [http://www.uga.edu/ovpi/academic\\_honesty/culture\\_honesty.htm](http://www.uga.edu/ovpi/academic_honesty/culture_honesty.htm).

## Grades

Grades will be determined on the following basis:

discussion questions and class participation	25%
first essay	25%
second essay	25%
third essay	25%

## Schedule of Class Meetings and Assignments

- Mon., Aug. 18** Introduction
- Wed., Aug. 20** **WHAT IS MICROHISTORY?**  
Appuhn, "Microhistory" [coursepack]; Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre*, Preface, Introduction, and Chapter 1.
- Fri., Aug. 22** Peasants in 16<sup>th</sup>-Century France
- Mon., Aug. 25** Hopes, Feelings, Constraints, and Possibilities  
Davis, *The Return of Martin Guerre*, finish.
- Wed., Aug. 27** The Historian as Storyteller  
Burke, "History of Events and the Revival of Narrative" [coursepack].
- Fri., Aug. 29** The Historian as Detective  
Muir, "Introduction: Observing Trifles" [coursepack]; Levi, "On Microhistory" [coursepack].
- Mon., Sept. 1** **no class** (Labor Day)
- Wed., Sept. 3** Working with Fragments  
Carlo Ginzburg, "Microhistory: Two or Three Things That I Know about It" [coursepack].
- Fri., Sept. 5** Histories of Medicine (and Progress)  
*Report of the trial of the Whitehaven rioters* [coursepack]; Duden, *The Woman Beneath the Skin*, Chapter 1 summary [handout].
- Mon., Sept. 8** Close Listening  
Duden, *The Woman Beneath the Skin*, Chapters 2 and 3.
- Wed., Sept. 10** The Mysterious Human Body  
Duden, *The Woman Beneath the Skin*, finish.
- Fri., Sept. 12** History and Anthropology  
**FIRST ESSAY DUE**
- Mon., Sept. 15** Thick Description  
Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight" [coursepack].
- Wed., Sept. 17** The Great Cat Massacre  
Robert Darnton, "Workers Revolt" [coursepack].

## MODERN MICROHISTORIES

- Fri., Sept. 19** **The Atlantic Slave Trade**  
Harms, *The Diligent*, Preface and Part I (pp. xi-xxi, 3-28)
- Mon., Sept. 22** Connections to the Slave Trade  
Harms, *The Diligent*, Parts II-V (pp.31-148)
- Wed., Sept. 24** SAMPLE RESEARCH PROJECT: Microhistories of Jazz (a start)
- Fri., Sept. 26** SAMPLE RESEARCH PROJECT: Microhistories of Jazz (research)
- Mon., Sept. 29** One Ship  
Harms, *The Diligent*, finish (pp. 151-410)
- Wed., Oct. 1** **Institutions of Confinement**
- Fri., Oct. 3** The Eberbach Asylum  
Goldberg, *Sex, Religion, and the Making of Modern Madness* [coursepack].
- Mon., Oct. 6** McLean Hospital  
Kaysen, *Girl, Interrupted*.

- Wed., Oct. 8           **Nation-Building**
- Fri., Oct. 10           A Knock at the Door  
Kertzer, *The Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara*, pp. ix-117.
- Mon., Oct. 13           Church and State  
Kertzer, *The Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara*, pp. 118-265.
- Wed., Oct. 15           **Social Investigations**
- Fri., Oct. 17           Death in Soho  
Johnson, *The Ghost Map*, pp. 1-109.
- Mon., Oct. 20           Solving the Mystery  
Johnson, *The Ghost Map*, pp. 111-228.
- Wed., Oct. 22           **Political Communication**
- Fri., Oct. 24           Mise En Scène  
Corbin, *The Village of Cannibals*, pp. 1-60.
- Mon., Oct. 27           “Monstrous Brutes”  
Corbin, *The Village of Cannibals*, finish.
- Wed., Oct. 29           **Modern War and Memory**
- Fri., Oct. 31           no class (Fall Break)
- Mon., Nov. 3           The “Great War”  
Antoine Prost, “Verdun” [coursepack].
- SECOND ESSAY DUE**
- Wed., Nov. 5           Vietnam  
Hass, *Carried to the Wall* [coursepack]
- Fri., Nov. 7           War and Commemoration on Film
- Mon., Nov. 10           **Genocide**
- Wed., Nov. 12           Voices  
Browning, *Ordinary Men*, pp. xv-132.
- Fri., Nov. 14           **Oral presentations**
- Mon., Nov. 17           The Gray Zone  
Browning, *Ordinary Men*, finish.
- Wed., Nov. 19           **Oral presentations**  
**FILM: *Umberto D.* (De Sica, 1952) – 7:00-9:00 p.m., LeConte 101**
- Fri., Nov. 21           Film and History: Italian Neorealism  
Zavattini, “Some Ideas on the Cinema” [coursepack]; Perez, “*Umberto D.* and Realism”  
[coursepack].

**Nov. 24-28 – Thanksgiving Break**

- Mon., Dec. 1           **Totalitarianism**
- Wed., Dec. 3           **Oral presentations**
- Fri., Dec. 5           The Stasi  
Garton Ash, *The File*.  
**FILM: *The Lives of Others* (Von Donnersmarck, 2006) – 7:00-9:30 p.m., LeConte 101**
- Mon., Dec. 8           **Oral presentations**
- Tues., Dec. 9           **Oral presentations**