

Weirding the War

History 4990

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Unlike the other history classes you've taken at the University of Georgia, Senior Seminar involves the actual "doing" of history. Part writing workshop, part directed study, part support group, this class will help you to write an original historical essay, based on new sources and fresh perspectives, and written in prose that sings.

Like any artist, the goal of the historian is originality in the service of truth. But like any artist, the historian must first learn how to be original and how best to capture truths. In the first half of the semester, you will learn to think, research, and write like an historian. How do you find a good topic? How do you do original research? How do you come up with new insights? How do you craft an essay that is lively, persuasive, and important? Then, in the second half of the semester, you will be turned loose to *do* these things, occasionally reporting back to me and the group on your progress.

The thematic focus of this seminar is "Weirding the War." Not coincidentally, this is also the theme of a Civil War conference that will be hosted here in Athens in October 2009. In the call for papers, I urged potential conferees to "take a microhistorical approach, to give us a single story, incident, or phenomenon that leaves us with questions about the war we thought we knew." This will also be your charge. And who knows; one of you may write an essay that earns a place at that conference.

Schedule

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| Jan. 9 (f) | Introductions |
| Jan. 12 (m) | What Is "Weirding the War?"
Reading: Drew Gilpin Faust, "We Should Grow Too Fond of It': Why We Love the Civil War," <i>Civil War History</i> , vol. L, no. 4 (2004); Robert Darnton, <i>The Great Cat Massacre</i> (Vintage, 1985). |
| Jan. 14 (w) | What is Microhistory?
Reading: Jill Lepore, "Historians Who Love Too Much: Reflections on Microhistory and Biography," <i>Journal of American History</i> (June 2001); Richard D. Brown, "Microhistory and the Post-Modern Challenge," <i>Journal of the Early Republic</i> (Spring 2003). |
| Jan. 16 (f) | How Do I Find Sources?
Reading: Rampolla, Chapter 2 and Appendix B |
| Jan. 19 (m) | MLK Day |
| Jan. 21 (w) | The Original Civil War Microhistory
Reading: Mark Twain, "A Private History of a Campaign That Failed" (1885)
Assignment: Bring in the tentative topic of your microhistory. |

- Jan. 23 (f) Modeling Civil War Microhistory
Reading: Phillip Shaw Paludan, *Victims: A True Story of the Civil War* (University of Tennessee Press, 1981).
- Jan. 26 (m) What Makes Good Writing Good
Reading: "An Approach to Style," *The Elements of Style* (Allyn & Bacon, 2000).
Assignment: Bring in a two or three sentence quotation from any author in any genre that you think exemplifies great writing. Explain very briefly what you like about it.
- Jan. 28 (w) What Makes Good Historical Writing Good
Reading: Stephen Berry, "When Metal Meets Mettle," *North & South* (July 2006); James Davidson and Mark Lytle, "Introduction" and "The Visible and Invisible Worlds of Salem," from *After the Fact: The Art of Historical Detection* (McGraw-Hill, 2000).
Assignment: Bring in a favorite paragraph of historical writing. Explain what you like about the style.
- Jan. 30 (f) Writing From the Self
Reading: Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance," from *Essays* (1841); John Updike, "On Being a Self Forever," from *Self-Consciousness: Memoirs* (Knopf, 1989); Anne Lamott, "Getting Started," from *Bird by Bird* (Anchor, 1995); Annie Dillard, *The Writing Life* (Harper, 1998) [recommended].
Assignment: In a single page, describe a memory from your childhood. You are striving for hyper-realism, not sentimentality.
- Feb. 2 (m) Thinking About Writing About People
Reading: William Lee Miller, *Lincoln's Virtues* (Vintage, 2003).
Assignment: Write a one-page description of an historical figure you find compelling. Your sketch may include quirks, mannerisms, or habits of mind, in addition to physical description.
- Feb. 4 (w) Thinking About Genre and Narrative
Reading: "The Movie Maker as Historian: Conversations with Ken Burns," *Journal of American History* (December 1994); Suzanne Lebsack, "Truth or Dare: On History and Fiction," *Common-Place* (October 2004).
- Feb. 6 (f) No class
- Feb. 9 (m) Your Microhistory: Preliminary Presentations
Assignment: Bring in the working title of your microhistory. You may if you wish display the title as part of a mock-up book cover. Be prepared to explain your choices.
- Feb. 11 (w) Your Microhistory: Preliminary Presentations (cont'd)
Assignment: Bring in the working title of your microhistory. You may if you wish display the title as part of a mock-up book cover. Be prepared to explain your choices.
- Feb. 13 (f) Your Microhistory: Groupwork
Assignment: Bring in the opening paragraph of your microhistory.
- Feb. 20 (f) ** PROSPECTUS DUE **
- Feb. 23 (m) Individual meetings

Feb. 25 (w)	Individual meetings
March	No class
Apr. 6 (m)	Meet as group for progress reports and discussion
Apr. 20 (m)	Meet as group for final prep and discussion
Apr. 24 (f)	Oral presentations
Apr. 27 (m)	Oral presentations
Apr. 29 (w)	Oral presentations
May 4 (m)	** FINAL PAPERS DUE **

Grades:

Participation: 20%

Various writing assignments: 30%

Final paper: 50%