Microhistory
HIST 6800 (Readings in Global History), Spring 2015
Prof. Halperin

Mondays 3:00-5:30, Hale 235

To see a World in a Grain of Sand / And a Heaven in a Wild Flower, / Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand / And Eternity in an hour. –William Blake (“Auguries of Innocence,” written 1803).

Course Description
This course will be focused on the justifications for and utility of looking at the small, the local, or the seemingly insignificant in order to shed light on bigger historical trends, debates, and changes. Our readings will combine theoretical texts about methodological approaches with examples of the genre from around the world and from different historical periods. Students will, over the course of the semester, produce a paper built around a single incident, event, story, or case from their field and period of research, and work on reading, interpreting and contextualizing that event through reference to literature on the broader topics about which that incident or event raises questions.

Though microhistory may or may not be an appropriate overarching frame for your theses/dissertations, the readings and exercises of this class will help you consider how a close analysis of the small/incidental/local can be of service to you in a part or section of your project and in your work as a historian more general.

Readings
Most weeks of the course you will be expected to read a book and 1-2 articles. This is a lot of reading, so you should be conscious about working over the course of the semester towards improving the efficiency of your reading and note taking practices.

All articles will be posted to D2L.
The syllabus is subject to change (and supplementary readings probably will change): students will always be informed at least a week in advance about changes.
We will read the following books. Many are available used online. They will also be on 4 hr. hold at Norlin Library should you choose not to buy all of them.

* = Assigned in a week in which you will have a choice of two books to read (see syllabus).

9. Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms* (note: you probably already have it from your methods class).

Course Requirements

**READING/SPEAKING**

Class participation 25%

- Coming prepared to class, having done the reading and having taken notes that help you focus on key issues.
- Sharing your thoughts and analysis in class in ways that forward the conversation.
- Being respectful of others, building on each others’ comments, giving space for other students to speak.

Leadership of class discussion 5%
Twice during the semester you, along with one other student, will be expected to introduce the discussion: calling students’ attention to features of the reading that you believe will be conducive of discussion and posting two discussion questions in advance of the class.

READING/Writing
...FOR COMPREHENSION
Weekly writing assignments, starting in week 3 (Jan 26)
There are 13 weeks; you must do 12 of them.
(2 pages, double spaced) 25%
- These should connect issues of overarching structure and methodology with the author’s specific details, choices, and use of language. These specifics should be offered through frequent use of quotations and paraphrased details, cited by page number at the end of the sentence (Brown, 25).
- What was the writer’s motivation write this particular book? What was compelling enough about the subject, sources, and framing that it became an entire book?
- What sources did the author use? What research process did the writer undertake that allowed him/her to produce this work?
- What argument does the author make? (this argument may be explicitly stated at some point in the book, or may emerge from the narrative itself). What conclusions does the author want you to come away with regarding culture, politics, religion, social life, economics, or other issues as a product of you reading about one particular incident/case/person/community/place?
- What is the structure of the book? (You can think in terms of chapter breakdown as well as the structuring and flow of individual chapters). How does this structure work successfully (or not) to support the argument and conclusions?

...FOR SYNTHESIS
Paper #1: State of the topic. 15%
- Drawing your insights directly from and in conversation with what we have read so far in class (theoretical works, examples of the genre), offer an analysis of microhistory
  - What is it?
  - What is it for?
  - Why/how did it emerge?
  - How does it work in practice?
  - What are its limitations?
  - Regarding all of the above questions, there are a variety of answers, some of which contradict each other. Your answers should synthesize multiple approaches to these questions and address tensions and differences between sources.
  - Throughout, use concrete, specific examples from and discussions of texts—in the form of short quotations or well-chosen details that help you make your points and give specificity to your analysis.
READING/RESEARCH

Paper #2: Bringing Microhistory into your work 25%

This paper will be done in stages over the last half of the course (details to follow)

This is not a full fledged research paper, but rather an exploration of how you might apply the insights of this class’s readings to your own work.

- Choose a place/person/event from your own research that might be conducive to a microhistorical study, and introduce it in a compelling, narrative way.
- Drawing from (and engaging with/citing) methodological choices in other examples of microhistory we have dealt with in this class, what analytical techniques and interpretive possibilities. will be most appropriate to your chosen topic and why?
- What types of research (primary and secondary) do you need to do to draw together a body of source material to carry out the project that you have proposed? (This should be based on preliminary research in which you gather at least 10 new sources that you have not yet worked with).

1. January 12
   Introduction to the Course
   - Robert Darnton, “The Great Cat Massacre,” Ch. 2

2. January 17
   No Class, MLK Day: Read for Weeks 3-4

3. January 26
   Introduction to Method
   - Review your notes to Carlo Ginzburg, The Cheese and the Worms
   - Carlo Ginzburg, “Microhistory: Two or Three Things I know about it,” in Threads and Traces: True False Fictive pp. 193-214
   - David A. Bell, “Total History and Microhistory: The French and Italian Paradigms,” Companion to Western Historical Thought, pp. 262-276.

4. February 2
   Punishment and Law
5. February 9  
**Transgression**

6. February 16  
**The Everyday**

7. February 23  
**Biography as Microhistory**

8. March 2  
**The History of an Event**

9. March 9  
**Microhistory of Totalitarianism**
10. March 16

**Microhistory of Annihilation**

March 23: No class, Spring Break

11. March 30

**Colonialism and Anti-Colonialism I (South Asia)**

12. April 6

**Colonialism and Anti-Colonialism II (East Asia)**

13. April 13

**The Small Town in the Global Economy**

14. April 20
**Gender and Violence**

15. April 27
**Race and Violence**