

**History 300: Historical Methods and Writing**  
**War, Propaganda and Media in European History**  
*Fall Semester, 2018*  
*John Abbott*

Office Hours: 10-10:50am M/W/F (or by appt.)  
Email: [jabbot1@uic.edu](mailto:jabbot1@uic.edu)

Room 1015, University Hall

A democratic civilization will save itself only if it makes the language of the image into a stimulus for critical reflection – not an invitation for hypnosis.

– Umberto Eco

**Course description**

History 300 provides history majors an extended workshop in historical methods and writing, organized around particular themes. In this class we will study the evolving relationship between media, governments and warfare in the modern era. We pay particular attention to World Wars I and II, addressing issues such as censorship, propaganda and stage-managed journalism. We also consider how wars and battlefield deaths have been commemorated, examining the degree to which war experiences have been accurately reflected in public memory. And we will examine the ways in which media, so often serving as accomplices to war, have also worked to undermine the claims and aims of the war-makers.

An assortment of books, articles and primary source materials will guide our exploration of these issues. The heart of this course however lies in ways in which students hone their interpretive and expository skills through an intensive schedule of assigned writings, discussion, revision, and class presentation.

**Required Readings:**

Jeremy Popkin, *From Herodotus to H-Net*

Additional readings available via Blackboard (see schedule below)

**Course Requirements**

a) *Writing assignments* include: two short essays (due September 7 & 14) and one critical analysis (“Battle of Algiers”; due Sept. 28). Combined, these make up 25 percent of your grade.

b) *Classroom participation* and performance, including entries to Discussion Board forums at Blackboard. Discussion forums will address selected class topics (e.g. collective memory, interpretation of particular propagandistic works etc.). Your combined participation score counts for another 25 percent of your final grade.

c) *A research proposal*, including provisional bibliography, due Nov. 7 (5 percent of grade).

d) *A research paper* (ca. 10-12 pp., plus bibliography), reflecting work in both primary and secondary source materials. The rough draft for this is due November 21; your revised version is due the last day of class (December 5). Worth 40 percent of grade.

e) An in-class presentation covering your topic of research (during weeks 14 and 15), worth 5 percent of your grade.

## **Course Ethics**

This course focuses most of all on writing, the most solitary of activities. But historical writing is also a social transaction, by which we establish new pathways between past and present, connecting bygone eras with current-day audiences. There is both art and technique to this process, and much of this class will be devoted to mastering these. To this end, you will be asked to discuss and evaluate the work of your classmates, who will in turn comment on yours. In all this, collegiality and respect for one another's ideas and work are crucial.

## **Course Policies**

a) *No phones* out during class (not negotiable). In those cases where students use laptops for purposes unrelated to class, they will be asked (once only) to put these away.

b) *Plagiarism* in any form will be dealt with harshly. Recycling papers from the internet or elsewhere, copying other students' work, or cutting-and-pasting from other sources will be punished to the fullest extent of university policy. Count on this.

c) *Classroom citizenship*. Classroom behavior is one of many factors determining your final participation grade. Showing up prepared, answering or asking questions, taking notes and paying attention – these will be appreciated and duly noted. On the other side of the ledger: consistently showing up late, talking during class, using laptops for purposes other than note-taking and other disruptive behavior will also be duly noted. A special category in hell is reserved for those students who come to class, sign the attendance sheet, and then walk out. You really don't want to call that kind of attention to yourself.

d) *Religious holidays*. In those instances when classroom schedules conflict with religious holidays, students should provide me advance notification of their absence. I will in turn make every reasonable effort to honor these requests and make necessary accommodations.

e) *Disability accommodations*. We are committed to working with the Disability Resource Center in ensuring a barrier-free environment to all students at UIC. Please let me know as early as possible in the semester as to anticipated accommodations.

f) *Know your rights*. UIC is devoted to the principles of academic freedom, equality of opportunity and human dignity. Freedom from discrimination for both students and employees is central to our academic mission. Students are encouraged to study UIC's policies and procedures pertaining to these issues, accessible at the web pages of the Office of Access and Equity (go to <http://oae.uic.edu/>).

## Course Schedule

### Week 1                    Getting Started

Aug 29 Introduction: course themes and mechanics; what is history? Reading: Thucydides excerpt (at Blackboard); Popkin, Preface & Chapter 1 (x-xiv; 3-24)

### Week 2 (Sept. 5)        Ancient Wars and History's Great Men

- a) Ancient and Medieval history. Popkin, Chapter 2 (25-46)
- b) War, persuasion and propaganda in History. "Pericles Funeral Oration" & "Achievements of the Divine Augustus" at Blackboard.
- c) Discussion of possible paper topics.

**Friday, Sept. 7: first papers due** (your favorite historical book & why; submit online)

### Week 3 (Sept. 12)     Wars of Liberation, Too

- a) Writing workshop & quiz (review style sheet at Blackboard)
- b) Film, "The Battle of Algiers." Without equal as a cinematic representation of anti-colonial warfare, Gillo Pontecorvo's 1966 "Battle of Algiers" poses provocative challenges to historians: where do we draw lines between political advocacy and our professional responsibilities? You will address these and related questions in your second writing assignment (due Sept. 26); today we get started by watching the movie in its entirety (121 minutes).

**Friday, Sept. 14: Second papers due** (turning points; submit online)

### Week 4 (Sept. 19)     Religion and War

- a) in-class library session, devoted to locating research materials for "Battle of Algiers" paper. *Come prepared with your research ideas and proposals!*
- b) Religion, politics and war: from the Crusades to the Thirty Years War. Urban II speech & other materials at Blackboard)
- c) History as profession and academic discipline. Popkin, Chapters 3 & 4 (pp. 25-96)

### Week 5 (Sept. 26)     Media and Propaganda

- a) War & the Nation. Blackboard readings from French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars
- b) Inventing war journalism. Knightley, *The First Casualty*, pp. 1-66 (available at Blackboard)
- c) "Publics" and "crowds" in history. Kant & LeBon readings available at Blackboard

**Friday, Sept. 28: third papers due** ("Battle of Algiers" paper, submit online)

### Week 6 (Oct. 3)        Start thinking about those papers!

- a) War in an age of Industrialization & Nationalism. James Sheehan, Chapters 1 & 2 (pp. 3-41) from *Where Have All the Soldiers Gone?* (see Blackboard)
- b) Defining propaganda; discussion based upon Jacques Ellul's *Propaganda* (reading at Blackboard)
- c) Collective memory and history. Materials at Blackboard

### Week 7 (Oct. 10)      Keep thinking about those papers

*Library visit to identify source materials for semester projects*

**Discussion Board (Blackboard) entries on Collective Memory due**

**Week 8 (Oct 17) More thinking about those papers**

No class: individual meetings to discuss course writing project

**Continuation of Discussion Board forum on Collective Memory**

**Week 9 (Oct. 24) Individual Meetings, cont.**

No class: individual meetings to discuss course writing project

**Discussion Board entries (my project & why) due Oct. 24; commentary due Oct. 27**

**Week 10 (Oct. 31) A War to End All Wars**

a) Militarism, imperialism and war. Readings: Friedrich Bernhardt, "Germany and the Next War"; "Colonial Folly and European Suicide" article, both at Blackboard

b) Propaganda and censorship in the Great War (lecture & visual presentation).

c) Controlling Information: Soldiers' Letters Home. John Horne, "Soldiers, Civilians and the Warfare of Attrition" (article and selected soldiers' letters home at Blackboard)

**Week 11 (Nov. 7) War Remembered**

a) Grief and mourning. Excerpt from Jay Winter's *Sites of Mourning* at Blackboard

b) New media (radio, movies etc.). Readings at Blackboard

c) History Writing in an Age of Conflict. Popkin, Chapter 5 (pp. 97-124)

**Project proposals (with bibliographies) due**

**Week 12 (Nov. 14) Rehabilitating War**

a) Soviet Propaganda. Readings at Blackboard

b) Nazi Propaganda. Readings at Blackboard

c) Making sense of history's "glorious confusion." Popkin, Chapter 6 (pp. 125-65)

**Week 13 (Nov. 21) War Propaganda**

a) The American view: Frank Capra's "Why We Fight." **Draft versions of papers due!**

b) Pre-emptive Propaganda: Germany's "Ohm Krüger"

**Week 14 (Nov. 28) Student Presentations**

Oral presentations of research topics.

**Entries for Discussion Forum (World War II in film) due**

**Week 15 (Dec. 5) Presentations, cont.**

Presentations and class summary. **Revised papers turned in**