

**E10.2135: Historical Research**  
**Dr. Jonathan Zimmerman**

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This course will explore and apply the central methods and theories of modern historical research. In weekly readings and discussions, we will probe how historians choose topics, frame questions, gather evidence, and draw conclusions. Throughout the semester, meanwhile, each student will practice these skills via an original piece of primary research. The goal is to expand history, not simply to “examine” it.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

1. Reading: For each week, I will assign several short readings. Several of the readings are drawn from two books, both available in at the bookstore:

Hasia Diner, Lower East Side Memories  
Peter Charles Hoffer, Past Imperfect

The other readings come from a variety of publications. Most of them are available on the Internet, via the Bobst Library website. The rest will be available on “Blackboard,” as indicated below.

2. Responses: Each week, I will ask you to hand in a BRIEF (**1-2 pages, maximum**) response to the assigned readings. As my questions on the course schedule should indicate, I hope this exercise encourages you to apply the readings to your own historical research. Please note: I do not accept late responses.

3. Attendance: In this course, I want us all to learn from each other. So it is imperative that you prepare for--and attend--every class, on time. If an emergency forces you to be tardy or absent, I would ask that you please notify me (by phone or e-mail) beforehand.

4. Classroom Presentation: During the last three classes, each student will present their key historical argument. To illuminate it, please use at least one visual or aural aid (photograph, film, music, etc.).

5. Final Essay: In lieu of a final exam, I will collect your essays on May 5. My prime criteria in evaluating them will be the originality and clarity of your argument. So as you research and write, ask yourself: What is the state of current knowledge on my subject? How will my project alter or augment it? Have I demonstrated how my own claims differ from other historians’ work? Please note: I do not accept late essays.

**GRADING**

Weekly Responses: 25%  
Classroom Presentation and Participation: 25%  
Final Essay: 50%

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

January 20: Course introduction

January 27: The Historical is Personal: Choosing a Subject

“Round Table: Self and Subject,” Journal of American History 89 (June 2002), 17-53.

“Interchange: History and the Professional Schools,” Journal of American History 92 (September 2005), 1-24.

**Response:** How do historians choose their subjects of study? Which subject have you selected? Why?

February 3: Framing a Question, I: Probing the Secondary Literature

JoAnne Meyerowitz, “Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of Postwar Mass Culture, 1946-1958,” Journal of American History 79 (March 1993), 1455-1482.

Robert M. Collins, “The Originality Trap: Richard Hofstadter on Populism,” Journal of American History 76 (June 1989): 150-167.

Jonathan Zimmerman, “The Flight From Cool: American Men and Romantic Love in the 1950s,” History of the Family 2 (1997), 31-47 (on “Blackboard”).

**Response:** How do historians use other scholars’ work to ask new questions about their subject? What secondary literature do you expect to address in your own research?

February 10: Framing a Question, II: Identifying Primary Sources

Gabriella Petrick, “‘Like Ribbons of Green and Gold’: Industrializing Lettuce and the Quest For Quality in the Salinas Valley, 1920-1965,” Agricultural History 80 (2006), 269-295 (on Blackboard)

Gerald Fitzgerald and Gabriella Petrick, “In Good Taste: Rethinking American History with Our Palates,” Journal of American History 95 (September 2008), 392-404.

Diana Turk, selections from Bound by a Mighty Vow: Sisterhood and Women’s Fraternities, 1870-1920 (New York University Press, 2004) (on Blackboard).

**Response:** How do historians select primary sources? How do they use these sources to frame new questions and suggest new answers? Which primary sources will help you frame and answer your own question?

**Presentation:** *Dr. Gabriella Petrick, Department of Nutrition and Food Studies; Dr. Diana Turk, Department of Teaching and Learning*

February 17: The Theory--and Practice--of History

Hoffer, Past Imperfect, chs. 1-4

**Response:** How have American historians’ dominant theories and practices changed over the past century? Which of these theories and/or practices might influence your own project? How?

February 24: “New” sources, I: Oral Histories

Kathleen M. Blee, “Evidence, Empathy, and Ethics: Lessons from Oral Histories of the Klan,” Journal of American History 80 (Sept. 1993), 596-606.

Patrick Hagopian, “Voices from Vietnam: Veterans’ Oral Histories in the Classroom,” Journal of American History 87 (September 2000), 593-601.

Linda Shopes, E. Taylor Atkins, and Zachary M. Schrag, “Forum on IRBs,” Perspectives Online 45 (March 2007), at <http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/2007/>

0703/index.cfm.

Jonathan Zimmerman, "Beyond Double Consciousness: Black Peace Corps Volunteers in Africa, 1961-1971," Journal of American History 82 (1995), 999-1028.

**Response:** How does oral-history evidence differ from other sorts of primary data? How might you use oral histories to further your own project?

March 3: "New" sources, II: Photography, Film, Architecture, Art

Diner, Lower East Side Memories

**Response:** How do historians draw conclusions from so-called "visual" sources? How might these sources improve your own project?

**Presentation:** *Dr. Hasia Diner, Department of History*

March 10: Bringing It All Together (I Hope)

Jonathan Zimmerman, "Pride Or Prejudice? Ethnicity and Foreign-Language Instruction, 1890-1940" (manuscript submitted to Journal of American History, September 2000) (on Blackboard).

Jonathan Zimmerman, "Ethnics Against Ethnicity: European Immigrants and Foreign-Language Instruction, 1890-1940," Journal of American History 89 (March 2002), 1383-1404.

**Response:** What do the evaluations and revisions of this essay tell us about the process of creating history? What "lessons" might you derive from this exchange that you could apply to your own scholarship?

March 24: **RESEARCH UPDATE AND TROUBLE-SHOOTING**

Please E-MAIL a tentative introduction and outline to the group NO LATER than Friday, March 20.

March 31: "Objectivity" and Fraud in History

Hoffer, Past Imperfect, chs. 5-7 and conclusion

**Response:** What accounts for the recent spate of scandals surrounding "facts, fictions, and fraud" in American historical scholarship? How might knowledge of these episodes affect or alter the way you pursue your own scholarship?

April 7: History and its Publics

"Interchange: The Problem of Digital History," Journal of American History 95 (September 2008), 452-488.

Jonathan Zimmerman, "Across the Great Divide: American Historians and Their Publics" (on Blackboard)

Selected articles and op-ed pieces by Jonathan Zimmerman and others (to be distributed)

**Response:** Who should determine how our past is written and commemorated? What role do historians play--or should they play--in public discourse? How might your own project contribute to public discussion or debate?

April 14: **Presentations, I**

April 21: **Presentations, II**

April 28: **Presentations, III**

May 5: **FINAL PROJECT DUE**