

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

HISTORY 600

SPRING 2025 SEMINAR TOPICS

Instructions & Guidelines

The History 600 seminars offered by the Department of History in Spring 2025 are listed below. All History 600s require instructor permission to enroll. Please read the course descriptions carefully and begin contacting faculty as soon as possible once you have found the seminar that you would like to take. We do not allow students to request permission from multiple instructors at the same time, so please make your choice early and only contact another instructor if you are unable to get a seat in your first-choice course. When an instructor gives their permission to have you in the course, you can be sure that your seat is reserved. Shortly before enrollment begins, you will also receive a confirmation email from Scott Burkhardt letting you know that instructor permission has been entered into the enrollment system. At that point, you should be set to enroll when your appointment arrives.

In your emails to professors, please include the following information:

1) Subject Line: History 600 Seminar

Emails titled in this way are more likely to receive a timely response.

2) 10-Digit Campus ID#

This is very important, as permission to enroll cannot be entered without your 10-digit campus ID number, so any delay in getting this information could delay your enrollment in the course.

3) Why you are interested in the course

In the course information, some professors have more-specific instructions and ask for additional information, so be sure to address those items as well.

Important: History 600 seminars are open to History majors and History certificate students who have completed a History 201/Hist Sci 211 course. If you have not declared the History major or the History certificate, you must do so before you will be authorized to enroll in a seminar. See the [History Advising page](#) for information about who to contact to declare the major and certificate.

HISTORY 600-001

EUROPEAN POPULISM

Professor Laird Boswell
Thursday 11:00am-12:55pm

Students interested in this course should contact Professor Laird Boswell via email (lboswell@wisc.edu) with their campus ID number, major, year in college, and a brief description of their interest in the course.

This seminar focuses on the history of populism, especially right-wing populism, in Europe from the end of the Second World War to the present. The revival of a powerful radical right has been a crucial turning point in late twentieth century European society. Over the course of the semester, we will place the movement in historical perspective and analyze its revival. What are the social and political roots of the contemporary extreme right and why has it met with success in some of the European Union's most prosperous and stable countries? How did the extreme right reconstruct itself in the wake of fascism's defeat in 1945? Is it best characterized as a type of neofascism or as a new form of populism? The readings will introduce you to a range of interpretations and focus on France (the Front National), Austria (the Freedom Party), and Italy (the Lega Nord, the Five Star Movement, and Fratelli d'Italia) as case studies. Students are welcome to focus on other countries for their research papers and can also work on the development of left wing forms of populism over the past two decades. During the second half of the semester students will research and write a 20-25 page research paper based on primary and secondary sources.

HISTORY 600-002

MIGRATION AND ME: RESEARCHING FAMILY STORIES

Professor Kathryn Ciancia
Wednesday 11:00am-12:55pm

Students interested in this course should email Professor Ciancia (ciancia@wisc.edu) or come to office hours, Thursdays, 11:00am-12:30pm in Mosse 4133.

Many of us have heard stories about the movement of our ancestors from place to place—and even from continent to continent. Such histories of migration, whether within or across international borders, are always personally dramatic: people flee persecution, are forcibly relocated, or move for economic advancement; they leave behind loved ones and attempt to make a new life in a new place; they miss home and then ask themselves what “home” even means. Stories of migration become lodged into family lore, frequently acting as myths about what families mean to their members, even if we are not entirely sure exactly how, why, or even if these events happened.

While genealogical research is often the work of non-professional historians, this class allows students to situate characters from their own families within the broader historical contexts to which those people belong. During the first half of the semester, students will read examples of this genre of history; learn how to work with internet-based genealogical search engines, such as ancestry.com, the SlaveVoyages website, Ellis Island records, and national censuses; practice scouring local and national newspapers; explore the best practices for conducting oral histories with family members; and discuss how they might analyze treasured family objects. In the second half of the class, students will write a research paper, reconstructing the experiences of family members—living or dead—and using those people’s stories as a lens through which to explore larger issues linked to migration, such as class, nationalism, racism, war, gender, borders, and citizenship. Along the way, we will discuss the excitements and challenges of this kind of historical detective work, the ways in which it affects our personal sense of identity, and how revelations about family history might inform contemporary debates about migration in the United States and beyond.

HISTORY 600-003

INDIAN REMOVAL

Professor John Hall
Wednesday 1:20-3:15pm

Students interested in this course should contact Professor John Hall via email (jwhall3@wisc.edu) with their campus ID number, major, year in college, and a brief description of their interest in the course.

On 26 May 1830, Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act into law, fulfilling an inauguration-day pledge and providing the legal pretext for the greatest forced relocation in American history. By the mid-1840s, the United States had removed approximately 50,000 Native Americans to marginal lands in the west, where they were reduced to economic dependency and threatened with cultural extinction. In broad terms, most Americans are familiar with the Cherokee “Trail of Tears” and acknowledge this indelible stain on Jackson’s historical legacy. Yet Americans—Native or otherwise—have remembered the tragedy of removal in socially useful manners that essentialize the participants along strictly racial lines as victims or aggressors. This course will reexamine one of the most regrettable chapters of American history in the light of primary documents, oral traditions, and recent scholarship to reveal a more complex conflict over the locus of sovereignty, the meaning of national honor, the sources of republican virtue, and the currency of class and race as measures of human worth.

HISTORY 600-005

CITIZENS AND OTHERS IN NORTH AMERICAN HISTORY

Professor Stephen Kantrowitz
Monday 1:20-3:15pm

Students interested in enrolling in this course should email Prof. Kantrowitz (skantrow@wisc.edu), including their major(s) and their expected semester of graduation, and explaining their interest in the course topic and any previous course or research experience that has prepared them to explore it.

Who belongs to the United States, and how? What forces—of law, race, language, religion, origin, and more—have determined people’s legal and social status? This seminar will offer models and examples of how historians of the U.S. and other North American places have explored these questions, ranging across the experiences of African Americans, Native Americans, European immigrants, and many other groups. Students will pursue individual research projects that fit broadly within this theme, producing a paper of about 20 pages based on original research.

HISTORY 600-006

MIDDLE AGES IN FILM

Professor Elizabeth Lapina
Thursday 1:20-3:15pm

Students interested in this course should contact Professor Elizabeth Lapina via email (lapina@wisc.edu) with their campus ID number, major(s), year in college, and a brief description of their interest in the course.

In this course we will watch, read about and discuss a series of films on various medieval subjects. Some of these films will be blockbusters, but most will be films that are little known to the general public. Some of them will be recent, but most will date from the middle to late 20th century. Some of them will be American, the rest European and Asian. We will gain an awareness of medieval realities and medieval texts on which these films are based. However, we will move beyond simply noting whether each film is offering a faithful or an unfaithful representation of historical events and will attempt to understand what attracted modern filmmakers to medieval history in the first place and what concerns – be they artistic, political, social, religious, etc. – made them represent it in the ways that they did. Two topics in particular will be at the center of our discussion: violence and gender. The students will have to choose a film, a cluster of films, or a topic that runs across a series of films, which they will analyze in their essays and oral presentations.

HISTORY 600-007

CIA'S COVERT WARS & U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

Professor Alfred McCoy
Tuesday 11:00am-12:55pm

Students interested in enrolling should send Professor Alfred McCoy (awmccoy@wisc.edu) a short email with the following information: (a.) their status (Junior, Senior); (b.) major (History or other); (c.) past courses with this instructor, if any; (d.) GPA (overall and in major); (e.) campus ID (to facilitate registration); and (e.) a sentence about the reasons for their interest in the course.

Course Description: Designed for undergraduates and graduate students with some background in U.S. diplomatic history or international relations, the course will probe the dynamics of CIA covert wars through comparative case histories over the past 75 years. By focusing on world regions such as Europe, Latin America, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia, the seminar will explore the central role these covert wars played in the Cold War and its aftermath. These clandestine interventions often succeeded brilliantly from a U.S. perspective. But they sometimes left behind ruined battlegrounds and ravaged societies that became veritable black holes of international instability.

After several sessions reviewing the origins of the CIA and its distinctive patterns of clandestine warfare, the seminar will apply a case-study approach to covert wars in Asia, Africa, Europe, and Latin America—including, the anti-Mossadeq coup in Iran, overthrow of Sukarno in Indonesia, Lumumba's murder in the Congo, and the protracted war in Afghanistan. Reflecting the significance of Southeast Asia to CIA operations, the seminar will also devote four sessions to this region, including anti-Sukarno operations in Indonesia, anti-communist pacification in the Philippines, counter-guerilla operations in South Vietnam, and the secret war in Laos—arguing that the latter two operations are central to understanding more recent conflicts in Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq.

Through the sum of such content, students should finish the seminar with knowledge about a key facet of U.S. foreign policy and a lifelong capacity for critical analysis of international relations. Beyond such an approach, the course will give students sharpened analytical abilities, refined research tactics, improved oral presentations, and better writing skills.

Class Meetings: This seminar will meet on Tuesdays from 11:00 a.m. to 12:55 p.m. in Room 5257 Humanities Building.

Office Hours: In Room 5131 Humanities, Thursdays 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., and other hours by appointment that can be arranged by emailing me at awmccoy@wisc.edu.

Grading: In addition to participating in each class, students shall be marked on their presentation of two 15-minute summaries of the week's topic, and three writing assignments—two short papers for the first and last class, as well as a major essay based on one of the student's oral presentations about a particular CIA covert operation.

HISTORY 600-008

BASEBALL & SOCIETY SINCE WWII

Professor David McDonald
Tuesday 1:20-3:15pm

Students interested in this course should email Professor David McDonald (dmmcdon1@wisc.edu) with their campus ID number, major, year in college, and a brief description of their interest in the course, accompanied by a list of related courses they have taken. Those interested in the class and seeking more information can also arrange a mutually agreeable meeting time with Prof. McDonald, using the email given above.

This seminar will involve participants in a semester-long discussion of the ways in which Major League Baseball has both reflected and shaped broader currents of social, cultural, political and economic change in American society since World War II. Thus, rather than understand baseball's history in terms of pennant races, players' statistics or the other considerations that often arise in the daily press, this seminar asks students to understand baseball—and, by extension, sport in general—in the contexts that have shaped it throughout its development. Seminar participants will benefit in particular from the perspectives of Allan H. Selig, whose involvement in these events included his role in his ownership of the Milwaukee Brewers, having brought the team to Milwaukee, and culminating in his becoming the longest-serving Commissioner of Major League Baseball, from the early 1990s until 2015.

The seminar will consist of weekly discussions of pivotal topics or moments in post-war baseball history. These subjects will run a gamut of such likely topics as the role of race/ethnicity, a changing media landscape, the game's geographical expansion, labor relations, baseball's economic footprint on the nation and in localities, shifting relations between the sport and government, as well as prominent controversies over the course of the last seven decades. As preparation for discussion, students will read a set of sources assigned weekly by the instructors. Participation in discussion of the weekly readings accounts for a large part of the final grade. As a research seminar, the course's other major component will be a research paper of 20-25 pages on a topic of the student's choice, using the abundant primary and secondary resources available in the Wisconsin Historical Society holdings, as well as other sources that students identify.

HISTORY 600-009

CRITICS OF MODERNITY

Professor Viren Murthy
Monday 3:30-5:25pm

Students interested in this course should contact Professor Murthy via email (vmurthy2@wisc.edu) with their campus ID number, major(s), year in college, and a brief description of their interest in the course.

This is an advanced research seminar on the problems of modernity, which include capitalism, colonialism and other forms of social domination. Modernity is a term that has been notoriously difficult to define and evaluated differently. Since the late 19th century to the present, there has been a consistent counter-current against the legitimacy of the institutions and ideas of modernity, which include, capitalism, representative democracy and the nation-state. In this course, we will analyze various forms of this anti-modern thought historically. Anti-modern thought largely continues in Asia today in the form of movements against the United States and the West, which we can think of as a contemporary reference point. Within the West, anti-modern thought emerges as either a radical or conservative reaction to institutions associated with capitalism. Understanding the nature of such intellectual movements involves theorizing capitalist modernity and therefore we will spend some time on Marxist and postcolonial attempts to analyze the logic of modernity. The readings for this course are potentially limitless and therefore, we must be selective; however, students are encouraged to reflect on discourses of modernity in the region of their interest. During the last weeks of the semester students will research and write a 20-25 page paper based on primary or secondary sources. We will keep this paper in mind throughout the semester and use the readings to help frame clear research questions.

Format: Reading and discussion. We will meet to discuss common readings during the semester. Students are expected to come prepared to seminar having done the reading.

HISTORY 600-010

THE GLOBAL ANTI-APARTHEID MOVEMENT

Professor Emily Callaci
Wednesday 1:20-3:15pm

Students interested in this course should contact Professor Emily Callaci via email (ejcallaci@wisc.edu) with their campus ID number, major, year in college, and a brief description of their interest in the course. Those interested in the class and seeking more information can also make an appointment via email to stop by Prof. Callaci's office hours, Tuesday 1-3 in Mosse Humanities.

In 1994, South Africa held its first free elections, ending decades of a system of racist white-minority rule known as apartheid. In the decades leading up to the first democratic elections, in addition to the protracted struggles of activists within South Africa, members of the global community put pressure on the regime through economic means, including sanctions, boycotts and divestment. What role did the global anti-apartheid movement have in ending apartheid? What motivated Civil Rights leaders, students, labor unions, artists, and other activists around the world to organize and advocate for divestment from apartheid South Africa? How did they convince their elected officials and everyday people in their communities to also care about this issue? How did the strategy of boycott, sanctions, and divestment in the global community work in relation to the on-the-ground strategies of South Africans to free themselves? How has the anti-apartheid divestment campaign inspired and influenced other social justice movements?

In this class, we will explore the global anti-apartheid campaign starting from our own campus, the University of Wisconsin, Madison. We will begin with a broad exploration of histories of boycotts and divestment, from the sugar boycotts of the abolition movement through the fossil fuel divestment movement of recent years. We will spend the first weeks of the semester considering the ideas of writers and activists ranging from Voltaire to Virginia Woolf, to Mahatma Gandhi, to Cesar Chavez. Next, we will spend several weeks building our knowledge of the history of apartheid in South Africa and the movement to overthrow it, both within and outside the borders of South Africa. Then, for most of the semester, we will research the global Anti-Apartheid movement, starting with the records of the Madison Anti-Apartheid Coalition, held in the Wisconsin Historical Society. While we will work collaboratively to uncover this history, each student will each complete their own individual project, based on rigorous and original historical research.