

Writing and Rewriting History: From Eusebius to YouTube

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Course Description

This five-day course provides an introduction to university-level History by exploring how historians over the centuries have approached the writing (and re-writing) of History. Why has it changed so much over the years? Where is the boundary between fact and opinion? Is there such a thing as ‘unbiased’ history? Ranging from antiquity to the present and exploring both human and digital technologies, this course unpacks the background, substance, and style of historical writings by Caesar, Eusebius, Jerome, Macaulay, Ranke, Marx, Lyotard, Schama, and others.

Learning Outcomes

1. Students will establish foundations in critical analysis essential for any university programme in the Arts and Humanities through reading, writing, and reflecting on historical methods.
2. Students will gain a sense of the history of historical methods.

Course Outline

Day 1 What is History? / History in Antiquity

What is commonly understood as ‘History’? After exploring this question, we consider how historians in ancient Greece and Rome such as Caesar and Eusebius approached History as a moral compass.

Day 2 Medieval and Renaissance Traditions / History and ‘Progress’

The Christian West in the Middle Ages interpreted history as world events being controlled by God. In the early modern period, this gradually shifted to God enabling ‘progress’ – somewhere between the spiritual and secular.

Day 3 History as ‘Social Science’ / Marxism

In the nineteenth century, History became established as a discipline in academic institutions. Many believed in discovering the past ‘as it actually happened’ scientifically through rigorous source-based research. This led to social scientific theories as a way to interpret the past – most notably with Marxist interpretations of ‘class conflict’ being the driver of history.

Day 4 Postmodernism / The Challenge to Eurocentrism

In the twentieth century, the two world wars and vast social change led to a crisis in meaning. Which way forward? Marxism? Liberal democracy? Fascism? Nationalism? Internationalism? As the world wrestled with meaning, the field of History similarly wrestled with postmodernism and whether there was such a thing as ‘objective truth’. Historians from the Global South also began to challenge histories that overemphasized the West and national boundaries.

Day 5 Popular and Public History / The Future of History?

In the later twentieth century, History was no longer *just* an academic discipline. At one extreme, it became a consumer product, commodified into entertainment in books, films, and even on YouTube. At the other extreme, it was shaped into official narratives by states and governments through museums, chronicles, and other means. This begs the question: what is the future of History?

Assessment

40% Participation

30% Homework / Presentation

30% In-class writing