

History 567
European Cultural History
Spring, 2007

Jonathan Dewald
555 Park Hall
Office hours: W, 1-3
email: jdewald@buffalo.edu

Culture-- understood both as a society's artistic and literary productions, and as its broader assumptions about what the world is like-- has been central to historical thinking over the last generation. Hence this course begins by looking at some influential approaches that social scientists, literary critics, and other theorists have taken to the concept of culture itself. After this theoretical orientation, we'll turn to some basic narrative schemes that have defined the shape of cultural change in early modern Europe, between about 1450 and the French Revolution of 1789: the narratives of Renaissance, Reformation, and Enlightenment. The remainder of the seminar will examine some basic problems that have recently preoccupied historians: the position of the intellectual, the relationship between intellectual life and political power, the status of science, and the relationship between history as a discipline and other methods for making sense of culture in the past. Throughout, the seminar's main purpose is to reflect on models of historical analysis that students will find helpful for studying other times and places.

Requirements: This is primarily a seminar about reading historical work and theories that can illuminate historical problems. Hence the main requirement is careful preparation of the reading assignments and participation in seminar discussions of them. There will also be three short writing assignments, focused on the assigned readings, and these will be tailored to the needs of individual students. Those for whom early modern Europe is a secondary or teaching field will be asked to prepare short summaries of themes in the readings; students planning more intensive work in the field may choose to prepare more in-depth essays.

Topics and assignments

January 17: Introduction: problems, methods, themes

Part 1: Some theoretical perspectives

January 24: What is culture and what does it do (1)?

assigned: Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures, chapters 1, 4, 5, 8, 14, 15

January 31: What is culture and what does it do (2)?

assigned: James C. Scott, Domination and the Arts of Resistance

February 7: What is culture and what does it do (3)?

assigned: Edward Said, Orientalism, pp. xv-xxx, 1-110, 201-254, 284-328

Part 2: Some foundational narratives

February 14: The Burckhardtian Renaissance and the Reformation

assigned: Jacob Burckhardt, The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy, parts 1 and 2; Eamon Duffy, The Stripping of the Altars, pp. xiii-xxxvii, 1-205, 301-337

February 21: The Reformation (2)

assigned: Duffy, The Stripping of the Altars, pp. 301-337; Philip Benedict, Christ's Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism, pp. xv-xxvi, 1-201, 533-546

February 28: The Enlightenment

assigned: James Melton, The Rise of the Public in Enlightenment Europe

Part 3: Knowledge and power

March 7: Europeans and others

assigned: Stephen Greenblatt, Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World; review Said, Orientalism.

March 14: Spring break

March 21: States and cultures

assigned: Timothy Blanning, The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture: Old Regime Europe 1660-1789, pp.1-194, 266-290

March 28: Science and power

assigned: H. C Erik Midelfort, A History of Madness in Sixteenth-Century Germany, pp. 1-181, 322-384

Part 4: Visual cultures and the problem of the Renaissance

April 4: In Italy

assigned: Michael Baxandall, Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style

April 11: In Northern Europe

assigned: Thomas Kaufmann, Court, Cloister, and City: The Art and Culture of Central Europe, 1450-1800, pp. 1-255

Part 5: The historian's knowledge

April 18: Challenges

assigned: Hayden White, The Content of the Form, pp. 1-82, 104-141, 185-213

April 25: For the defense

assigned: Roger Chartier, On the Edge of the Cliff