

DRAFT – SUBJECT TO CHANGE

HISTORY SEMINAR 506:401:01 FAMILY HISTORY

Meeting Time & Location: Wednesdays, 2:50-5:50 pm, College Ave Campus, SC 215

Instructor: Julia Stephens

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Office Hours: TBA, Van Dyck Hall 002G

This course explores how strategies of writing family history can serve as a “toolkit” for studying broader themes, including capitalism, empire, slavery, and revolution. While conventional approaches to history often focus on famous individuals, this course approaches the past from the perspective of everyday subjects, many of whom left only minimal official records of their lives. Methods of family history, including use of personal papers, oral interviews, and “micro” history, provide crucial alternative tools for exploring the lives of such subjects. As a capstone course for History majors, the course will guide students through the process of writing a substantial research paper. While topics can cover any time or place, students will be encouraged to use methods we cover in class, including working with personal diaries or letters, legal records related to marriage and inheritance, or online databases of genealogical resources. Some students may also choose to explore their own family histories, including conducting oral interviews, although this is not a requirement.

The core readings for the course focus on three family histories: a historian’s own efforts to trace her working-class roots in Britain; a legal scholar’s use of court-records to reconstruction the lives of a family of former slaves who migrated between Haiti, Cuba, New Orleans, and Belgium; and a personal memoir written by a Chinese-American academic who spent her childhood summers exploring the alleyways surrounding her grandparents’ home in Shanghai. Although covering different world regions and time periods, the three works are united by the authors’ common interest in exploring how large-scale political and economic forces played out in the daily lives of individuals. All three works also turn to alternative sources and methods in order to recover the lives of subjects who are difficult to locate in traditional historical archives.

While reading each of these three books over the course of three to four class meetings, we will focus on “excavating” the sources, methods, and styles each author uses. In the process we will have class sessions dedicated to personal letters, digital archives, oral interviews, material objects, and legal records. Each of these sessions will also introduce students to primary-source collections that they may choose to explore in more depth for their own research papers.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Your success in this class depends on pacing yourself throughout the semester so that you make steady progress towards your final goal of completing the 18-25 page primary-source paper. The course requirements include regular (almost weekly) short assignments which will help you to keep on track.

Attendance, Participation, Writing Groups, and Discussion Prompts (15%). Attendance and active participation in all class meetings is mandatory. Students who miss more than two

classes will have their participation grade reduced by one grade for each additional absence. Exceptions to this policy for medical or family emergencies will be made at the professor's discretion. In addition to attending and participating in each class, for some meetings students will also be asked to submit a short question or comment to jumpstart discussion. At the beginning of the semester each student will be assigned to a three-member writing group. Participation in writing-group activities, including peer editing, is a mandatory component of class participation.

Mini Source-Analysis Exercises (3 x 2 pages) (15%). Over the course of the semester students will be asked to complete three mini source-analysis exercises (details in course schedule), which will orient them towards working with different types of primary materials. These exercises will be grade \surd , $\surd+$, or $\surd-$.

Paper Proposal (3-pages) and Bibliography (15%) DUE OCT 27. Students will be required to turn in a graded paper proposal and bibliography in the 9th week of classes. At this point in the semester you should have completed the majority of the research for your project and should begin to think about the structure and argument of your paper.

Other Interim Paper Assignments (15%). In addition to the graded paper proposal, students will submit a topic statement (due in week 5), outline (due in week 11), and rough draft (DUE NOVEMBER 27). While these assignments will not be individually graded, failure to complete them on time will adversely affect your final grade.

Final Paper (18-25 pages) (40%). DUE DECEMBER 15. The core assignment for the course is a final research paper which will be based on work with primary sources. Students will have considerable freedom in choosing a topic; your paper should relate broadly to the theme of "family history," but you can use a wide variety of different research methods and focus on any time period or region. To help you in identifying a topic, during the early weeks of the semester the course will cover different historical collections available at Rutgers and discuss possible topics. The instructor will also be available during office hours for individual consultations. Students, however, should be prepared to do extensive independent research as they work towards completion of the final research paper. Success in this endeavor depends on pacing and organization; in order to stay on track students should devote shorter periods of time each week to making progress on the paper and in all cases must keep up with interim assignments.

COURSE MATERIALS

We will read the following three books in their entirety; student may either use the copy on reserve in the library or purchase their own, including through used-book vendors online. All other materials, including extensive primary sources, will be available via the course website.

Alison Light, *Common People: In Pursuit of My Ancestors* **ISBN-10:** 022633094X

Jie Li, *Shanghai Homes: Palimpsests of Private Life* **ISBN-10:** 0231167172

Rebecca J. Scott and Jean M. Hébrard, *Freedom Papers: An Atlantic Odyssey in the Age of Emancipation* **ISBN-10:** 0674416910

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1 (Sept 6): Course Overview & Introduction to Family History Sources at Rutgers

Get a head start on the reading for Unit 1 by beginning *Common People*, and start thinking about possible paper topics. It is never too early to begin your research!

UNIT I. FAMILY HISTORY AS METHOD RESEARCHING YOUR ROOTS AS “SERIOUS” HISTORY

Week 2 (Sept 13): What is Micro-history?

Jill Lepore, “Historians Who Love Too Much: Reflections on Microhistory and Biography,” *The Journal of American History* (June 2001): 129-144.

Light, *Common People*, pages TBA (roughly first 1/3).

Week 3 (Sept 20): Eavesdropping on History -- Personal Letters as Historical Sources

Selections from Letter-Writing Manual and Sample Letters (approximately 20 pages)

Light, *Common People*, pages TBA (roughly second 1/3).

Mini Source-Analysis: First read over the PDF of the letter-writing manual and sample letters. Using the guiding questions provided along with each source, write a short (2-page) response reflecting on how public conventions about “polite” correspondence shape the way in which individuals narrate their “private” lives through personal correspondence.

Week 4 (Sept 27): The Light Family – A Final Look

Light, *Common People*, pages TBA (roughly final 1/3).

UNIT II. ALTERNATIVE ARCHIVES DIGITAL, ORAL, AND MATERIAL SOURCES

Week 5 (Oct 4): Approaches to Digital Research and Sources for Your Papers

Paper Assignment 1 – Topic and Sources

At least 48-hours before class (Monday by 2:50 pm), you should email the professor and your writing group a short paragraph describing the topic you are considering for your research paper and ideas about possible sources you might use. We will discuss topic ideas and strategies for locating additional sources in class. You should finalize your topic by the end of this week and send a revised paragraph to the professor by Friday at 5pm.

In class this week we will also discuss approaches to online research. To prepare for the discussion, read Renee M. Sentilles, “Toiling in the Archives of Cyberspace,” in *Archive Stories*, 136-156; and also explore at least one of the digital archives listed on the course website.

Week 6 (Oct 11): Methods of Oral History (with Rutgers Oral History Archives)

Li, *Shanghai Homes: Palimpsests of Private Life*, pages TBA (roughly first 1/3).

Week 7 (Oct 18): Turning your Life into an Archive

Li, *Shanghai Homes*, pages TBA (roughly second 1/3).

Mini Source-Analysis: Option 1: Pick an object from your own life (such as Li's grandfather's diploma), which you will analyze as an archival source. Use your short reflection (2 pages) to discuss how the use and meaning of the object has changed over time. Try to be as concrete as possible, focusing on specific "traces" such as the X-marks that Li's grandfather made on his diploma to self-denounce his elite education.

Option 2: Conduct an oral interview (at least 30 minutes in length) with a member of your family. Before the interview prepare a list of at least five questions which will serve as a guide for engaging your interviewee in a conversation about the relationship between his/her life and major historical events. Make sure (with the permission of your interviewee) to record the interview, so you can include transcribed quotes in your reflection paper.

Week 8 (Oct 25): Shanghai Homes Final Discussion & Paper Proposals

Li, *Shanghai Homes*, pages TBA (roughly final 1/3).

Paper Assignment 2 (Due Oct 27): Proposal, Primary-Source Summary, and Bibliography

Your paper proposal (3 pages, not including bibliography) should describe your research topic, the primary sources you have collected, and some initial reflections on how your research relates to at least one major historical theme. The working bibliography should include detailed information about the primary-sources you have consulted so far and at least two or three secondary sources which will help you to contextualize your primary materials.

**UNIT III. FAMILY HISTORIES IN PUBLIC RECORDS
THE TINCHANTS' PAPER TRAIL TO FREEDOM**

Week 9 (Nov 1): Using Legal Sources to Write About Non-Elite People

Sample "Freedom Suit" from the St. Louis District Court's Online Archives.
Scott and Hébrard, *Freedom Papers*, pages TBA (roughly first 1/3).

Mini Source-Analysis: Using the strategies of "close-reading" which we have been discussing in class, read and analyze the sample documents from the "Freedom Suit." Pay particular attention to how in the seemingly dry prose of a legal document we can find fragments of personal information about the lives of non-elite subjects.

Week 10 (Nov 8): The Tinchants

Scott and Hébrard, *Freedom Papers*, pages TBA (roughly final 2/3).

Week 11 (Nov 15): “Reading to Write” & Peer Editing

For this week’s class we will return to the three books we read over the course of the semester but with a particular focus on the authors’ writing strategies and prose style. In preparation for this week’s class, pick a particular selection from one of the works (this could be a sentence, paragraph, or a couple of pages) that you think constitutes particularly effective historical writing. What makes it effective, and how could you use a similar strategy in your own writing?

Paper Assignment 3: The “Scaffolding” -- Outline, Introduction, and Topic Sentences.

Email an outline, introduction, and topic sentences for your paper to both your writing group and the professor at least 48-hours before class.

UNIT IV: GUIDED WRITING

Week 12 (Nov 29-Dec 1): Rough Drafts Due & Individual Meetings for Trouble-Shooting

Paper Assignment 4: Rough Draft. Email the rough draft of your paper to the professor by Monday Nov. 27.

In lieu of class this week the professor will hold mandatory 20-minute meetings to discuss your rough drafts.

Week 13 (Dec 6): Draft Workshopping

You will be responsible for reading and providing written comments on the rough drafts of the members of your writing group.

Week 14 (Dec 13): Paper Presentations

FINAL PAPER DUE DECEMBER 15