

**DRAFT**

**History Workshop 506:299:02  
Practices and Ideals of Toleration  
Rutgers University, Fall 2016**

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**Course Description**

What is history? How do historians use and interpret sources to analyze the thoughts and behaviors of people who lived in the past? How do historians construct narratives to convey the complexity of lives and experiences that often happened in times and places far removed from their own lives? These are some of the broad questions you will explore in History Workshop as we roll up our sleeves and learn how to use primary and secondary sources to explore the past.

To focus our exploration of these broad questions, we will examine a topic that has long fascinated historians, particularly in the past several decades: **the history of toleration**.

Toleration is a broad concept and ideal that has stood at the center of Western liberal thought for over four centuries from English philosopher John Locke (1632-1704) to American political philosopher John Rawls (1921-2002). As a concept, toleration is linked to other core concepts in the western liberal tradition including liberty, freedom, and individualism. Not surprisingly, History as a discipline was also shaped by a celebration of these ideals. Many historians have used “toleration” as a yardstick to assess and interpret different cultures and historical periods.

Like all intellectual concepts, moral ideals, and political practices, “toleration” and its close relative, “tolerance” have histories. We will explore the particular historical conditions in 16<sup>th</sup>- to 18<sup>th</sup>-century Europe and North America that made it so urgent and controversial for men and women to write and think about toleration.

We will not only explore the history of toleration as an ideal, but also as a practice. Studying the way cultures have—and have not -- practiced toleration will lead us to a variety of sources that tell us a great deal about how social boundaries between groups are shaped by religious practices, dress, marriage customs, food cultures, and even rituals surrounding death.

Throughout the course we will be attentive to the fact that “toleration,” like so many aspects of

human behavior, is often invisible to historians. Patterns of behavior that we call “toleration” don’t often show up in historical records. But intolerance and violence towards those who are perceived as “different” and “other” does show up in historical records. Human experience is particularly likely to create traces in the archive when it results in something problematic or worthy of note (something that ends up in a police report, a court case, or even a comment to a friend in a letter). Thus, the history of toleration will inevitably lead us to narratives with which it is inextricably entwined – the violence and brutality of racism, ethnocentrism, sexism, homophobia, and imperialism.

In the final section of the course, we’ll bring what we’ve learned about doing research and thinking like historians to bear on the history of toleration in the university, with a special focus on the history of Rutgers in the twentieth century.

The course is designed to engage students in learning how to analyze historically:

- Concepts
- States and systems of governance and legal codes
- Individual lives
- The lived experience of urban life
- Events
- Institutions

By the end of the semester, students will have a set of practical and conceptual tools that they can transfer to other history courses and the practice of doing history.