

## International History and Politics

Academic year 2021-2022

### Historians in the World

#### HPI135 - Autumn - 6 ECTS

Tuesday 08h15 - 10h00

### Course Description

Outside of the classroom, the lecture hall and the archive, what does history matter? In this course, we discuss the presence and absence of history in public concerns, and what purposes a historical education might serve in the world today. From 'history wars' over national identity and historical injustices to political clashes over the symbols that dominate public space, from the omissions of our schoolroom narratives to the mass consumption of historical fiction on the screen and on the page, the past seems everywhere and nowhere. Institutions say they want to learn from it, yet the world faces 'unprecedented' challenges to which it seems history is unable to speak. So how do we speak to the world?

#### > PROFESSOR

[Aidan Russell](#)

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Mona Bieling

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## Syllabus

This course is designed as an experimental combination of issues derived from public history, history education, critical history, the philosophy of history, and contemporary politics. It depends on a mixture of practical, empirical and theoretical discussions, texts and tasks.

During this course students will produce, and be primarily assessed on, a small portfolio of connected pieces that will explore a matter of history in public life, a medium of engagement/intervention with it, and the broader context of historical convictions, politics, arguments and values that surround it. The requirements, components and possibilities of this portfolio will be fully explored in the first class. In spirit, the purpose of the portfolio may be understood as combining creativity (in form and content) with rigorous and detailed intellectual analysis. The total workload for the portfolio should be roughly equivalent to a term-long self-directed research paper. The portfolio will be worth 70% of the final grade, and will be submitted on 7 January 2022.

The remaining 30% of the final grade will be assessed on class participation. This will be understood as comprising:

- i) preparation (reading assigned texts, reflecting on key questions and coming prepared to discuss them)
- ii) contribution to class discussions, online or in person
- iii) presentation: once during the semester, each student will be assigned to find examples of historical work outside of the academy, such as blogs, podcasts, opinion pieces and political commentary, policy and grey literature, exhibitions and museums, community or cultural activities, documentaries, historical fiction etc. (whether created by/with professional historians or not), and introduce them for discussion in relation to the themes and assigned texts of the week

A full reading list of class texts and further resources will be distributed at the start of term. As background, students may wish to explore any of the following:

Ashton, Paul, and Alex Trapeznik, eds. 2019. *What is Public History Globally?* Bloomsbury Academic.

Attwood, Bain, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Claudio Lomnitz. 2008. "The Public Life of History." *Public Culture* 20 (1): 1–4.

Bevernage, Berber, and Nico Wouters, eds. 2018. *The Palgrave Handbook of State-Sponsored History After 1945*. Springer.

Carretero, Mario, Stefan Berger, and Maria Grever, eds. 2017. *Palgrave Handbook of Research in Historical Culture and Education*. Springer.

Cauvin, Thomas. 2016. *Public History: A Textbook of Practice*. Routledge.

Clark, Anna, and Carla L. Peck, eds. 2019. *Contemplating Historical Consciousness: Notes From the Field*. London: Berghahn Books.

de Groot, Jerome. 2016. *Consuming History: Historians and Heritage in Contemporary Popular Culture*. London: Routledge.

Dean, David, ed. 2018. *A Companion to Public History*. John Wiley & Sons.

Eze, Michael Onyebuchi. 2010. *The Politics of History in Contemporary Africa*. Palgrave Macmillan

Green, Alix R. 2016. *History, Policy and Public Purpose: Historians and Historical Thinking in Government*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Jenkins, Keith, Sue Morgan, and Alun Munslow, eds. 2007. *Manifestos for History*. Routledge London.

Kleinberg, Ethan, Joan Wallach Scott and Gary Wilder. 2018. 'Theses on Theory and History', <http://theoryrevolt.com> (available in English, French, German and Portuguese)

Sayer, Faye. 2019. *Public History: A Practical Guide*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Seixas, Peter, ed. 2004. *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Tamm, Marek, and Laurent Olivier, eds. 2019. *Rethinking Historical Time: New Approaches to Presentism*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

*Some Special Issues:*

The Public Role of History - *History and Theory* 2005

Historical Fiction, Fictional History, and Historical Reality - *Rethinking History* 2005

Revision in History - *History and Theory* 2007

The Public Life of History – *Public Culture* 2008

Imperial Debris - *Cultural Anthropology* 2008

The New Metaphysics of Time - *History and Theory* 2012

History and Theory in a Global Frame - *History and Theory* 2015

Fallen Monuments - *International Public History* 2018

Decolonizing Histories in Theory and Practice - *History and Theory* 2020

*Course Schedule:*

## **Part 1: An Untimely Now? Thinking about the Public Lives of History**

### *1. Introduction: History Wars, Unprecedented Times and Agonistic Pasts*

Along with an overview of the course and its requirements, the opening class gives us an opportunity to briefly introduce some of the conversations from which the present course is derived: what are the public lives of history today, what might ‘public history’ be in a global context, what has ‘historical thinking’ been claimed to be, and why should theory matter for historians – especially when they look to leave the classroom.

### *2. In Time: Historical Consciousness, the Presence of the Past, and Other Historicities*

Here we take a moment to think about some of the most basic assumptions, and most critical ideas, that lie behind what history means within or without the university: how do past, present and future relate to each other, how do we relate to them, and how might this vary? Most importantly, what do these different experiences and understandings of time mean – for dialogue, conflict, or moral action?

## **Part 2: Actors, Speakers, Spaces**

### *3. History and Power: States, Institutions, and Their Historical Narratives*

Our second part looks to explore a selection of key moving parts of history in public life. First, we must begin with power: history has always been closely linked with projects of power, and is a primary concern for states and other governing institutions around the world – whether in matters of control, education, recognition or denial. Different forms of state presume, create or occlude different kinds of ‘public’ with relationships to different kinds of history. Considering the varied roles that historians have played in relation to these projects, we start by considering the actors involved, and the historical narratives and ideologies they create.

#### *4. Not From Below: Historical Thought outside Institutions*

Stepping away from both the university and the state, there is an endless variety of historical thought, work, perceptions and beliefs to consider in non-institutional settings, from family histories to community projects, from ‘amateur’ historical research to singers of the past and storytellers of many descriptions. Each again challenges our understanding of the ‘public’ amongst whom history may have a different kind of life. University historians, and ideas about history derived from them, take many roles in these activities, from dynamics of collaboration and support to struggles over expertise and authority. While exploring these potentialities, we will also ask one special question: the conventions of public history often push us to see the immense importance of such work on smaller scales of community, or stay limited to national frames, but is there a place or a possibility for such public history on an international stage?

#### *5. The Past in Public Space: Local and International*

With a taste for some of the most prominent actors who shape the public life of history, we take a moment to think further about the spaces in which people everywhere may be confronted with questions of history. Whether falling into the background of our lives, waiting for an exceptional encounter, or keeping ‘historical wounds’ gaping on the surface every day, public space is today at the forefront of public debates and confrontations about the past. As statues come down in one place and stay up in another, does anything change in the stakes of history between them?

### **Part 3: Media and Modes**

#### *6. Communication: Modes, Methods and Strategies*

We next switch to put bring some practical concerns into view, thinking about the methods and styles of communication that might be adopted to bring historical conversations to bear on matters of public life. In this session, we will think closely about how we write for different audiences, the different media we may employ (or that may employ us), and even how we may go beyond language to explore and express the connections between the past, present and future.

#### *7. Consuming History, Encountering the Past*

What if we start from the mode of reception rather than the intent of the ‘author’? When we do so, the definitions, meanings and uses of history in public life expand significantly.

Notably, if we think about history not as something taught, debated or applied but as consumed, we open out to the vast landscape of historical fiction, film, television, video games and performances of many kinds, and we may begin to appreciate many attitudes towards 'conventional' historical texts, museums and messages that do not submit to the common injunctions of the historian. In these encounters historians' strategies must change, but perhaps their own conception of what history *is* must change as well.

#### *8. Politicians, Practitioners, Policy and Historians*

Finally, we pay special attention here to the possibilities and problems of communicating historical research, and historically-informed perspectives, in policy circles of various kinds. Often desired (or at least requested), yet frequently mired in mutual dissatisfaction, exchange between politicians, practitioners and historians can be distinctly frustrating (even, perhaps especially, when individuals move from one category into the other). What should this relationship look like, and how, practically, can it be done well?

### **Part 4: Tropes, Stories, Problems**

Our final Part switches things round, and looks to explore a selection of common historical tropes, arguments or narratives that expose complex issues in the intersection of critical historical research, public interests, diverse actors and contemporary political issues. These are arguments that may be encountered in many forms, to many ends, and so may take us to many different cases, contexts and modes of communication around the world. But each time, we are looking for a similar set of questions: what is being done with these tropes, what do their different deployments say about the understanding of history's role in public life, and how can or should we engage with them?

#### *9. Value your Heritage*

First, we consider the complex and contradictory language of 'heritage': something to be valued (whether morally or economically), managed, exploited or traded, depending on the situation and the interests involved. Commonly demanding a distinct physical incarnation, yet equally intangible in quality and meaning for many, it is a topic that particularly shifts with language, culture and context, yet also constitutes a global conversation and system of (often competing and conflicting) interests. In preservation, restoration, return or destruction, heritage can be a deeply significant story of the past's consequential position in the present. When 'heritage' takes the place of 'history' in public life, what changes? And should anyone other than historians object?

#### *10. Repair and/or Move On*

Calls to repair the injustices of the past, and/or to leave such a past behind (healed or ignored), are among the most powerful and consequential (and in many cases the most divisive) narratives of history in the world today. What do they tell us about the experience of time, the perception of or desire for a 'break' between past and present, and the purposes of

historical work in matters of urgent present need and interest? How can or should 'historical thinking', whatever that may be, contribute to such political uses of history?

### *11. Intermission: Workshop*

Taking a break from our regular discussions, here we will have an opportunity to share work in progress on our portfolio projects, presenting and providing feedback on them in small groups (depending on numbers).

### *12. Learn or Repeat*

History offers lessons, and repeats itself: commonly invoked to insist on the importance of history in public life (today perhaps more often by non-historians than historians themselves), such precepts are also deeply problematic. What kind of history do they invoke? What do such claims do, in service of what purpose? At the same time, how can historical arguments best construct and communicate the kinds of comparisons, explanations and warnings that people seek when they look to the past to understand the present? These are fundamental questions of historical work, but their loss in translation into public life represents a major challenge for historians looking to act in the world.

### *13. Unprecedented*

If we're not all sick of living in unprecedented times, we all soon will be. What does such a denial of historical relevance do to political debates today? How does the perception or construction of crisis relate to the voiding of historical insight? How do we argue against this? And when might it be true – that a changing world is so new, and the future that unfolds so dramatically different from what we have anticipated before, that history (in its current forms) truly can say nothing to prepare for it?

### *14. Review*

A final chance to think back and consider where we might go next with each of the practical, theoretical and empirical discussions we've touched upon along the way.