

HIST 1954J: HISTORY OF THE BOOK IN THE AMERICAS AND BEYOND

Spring 2019, M 3-5:30pm, John Carter Brown Library Conference Room

halperta.com/2019-bookhistory

Instructors

Dr. Hannah Alpert-Abrams (she/her/hers)

Office Hours: Tues 1-3 in the Parker Room at the JCB (ask at the front desk).

Please book an appointment: <https://halperta.youcanbook.me/>

If you can't make these hours, email me: halperta@brown.edu

Dr. Neil Safier (he/him/his). Office Hours: Contact rebecca_laferriere@brown.edu for appt.

Dr. Stijn Van Rossem (he/him/his). Office Hours: By appointment. stijn_vanrossem@brown.edu

Communication

Contact Dr. Alpert-Abrams for all questions related to course readings, assignments, and grades. Expect a response within 24 hours during weekdays. Weekends are not guaranteed.

What you'll find in this syllabus

- Course Description
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Course Description

This course surveys the history of book production in the early modern world (1400-1800), from the invention of moveable type in Asia to the development of printing in Europe and across the Americas, as circulation of the printed codex grew in tandem with global imperial expansion. Taught at the John Carter Brown Library with access to the Library's world-class collection of Americana, we will examine the book trade, the early years of book production in Latin America and the Philippines, and the broader place of books, maps, and printed materials in colonial American life in the Northern and Southern hemispheres.

While the course content will be broad, over the semester each student will be responsible for working with a single volume from the JCB collection, selected from a list compiled by JCB staff ([Book list](#)) or on your own with recommendations from instructors or Library staff.

Unit 1: The Nature of the Book

What is a book? What are the historical processes that created the book as we know it, what values inform the way we understand book history, and what alternative forms of bookishness are there? What histories and voices are embedded in the creation of the book, and what methods can we use to uncover those pasts?

Unit 2: Book Work

Who makes books? What kind of work is involved in the process of creating, circulating, reading, and preserving books? How do we study those people and their impact on books and on history, and what can this kind of research tell us about history?

Unit 3: Remediation

What happens when books take on new forms and engage with new kinds of media? What is a book in film, a book in music, a book online? How does remediation reshape the book, and what kinds of futures does it enable for the study of book history?

Learning Goals

To know how to situate a book in its historical context as a material object: how to identify interesting features of a material text, ask questions about those features, and seek out answers.

To understand local contexts for book production, use, and ideology in the early Americas, and how they fit into trans-imperial or global contexts of empire, knowledge, and power.

To learn how texts & text technologies have been used to circulate information, consolidate power, create the historical record, and enable revolutionary thought & action.

To develop classroom skills including: communicating with faculty, managing and implementing a project, revision and peer review

Assignments

Minor or In-Class Assignments

Participation: 10% (2.5 hours per week)

Come to class, participate in discussion and in workshops. This will significantly enhance your learning but will not be policed. We place the responsibility for learning in your hands. Evaluation: credit/no credit.

Weekly Writing Assignment 20% (1 hour per week)

Every week, you will have a short writing assignment designed to help you prepare for discussion. You are allowed to skip up to three of these assignments. Evaluation: credit/no credit.

Printing Exercise 10% (about 3 hours outside of class)

As a class, we'll be setting type and printing a broadside that displays a sequence of phrases assembled from the books you're working with.

For this assignment, you are responsible for choosing one sentence or phrase from the book that you've chosen to work with this semester. You'll need to go to the Book Arts Studio at the Hay and work with Erica Mena-Landry to set the type on your own (we'll discuss the scheduling in class), and then we'll be visiting and printing the broadside together during class time. Evaluation: Credit/No credit.

Major Assignments

This course has three major assignments. For the first two assignments, you will learn about a single book in the JCB collection and write two pieces, one describing its physical condition, and the second describing its historical context. For the third assignment, you will work in groups to curate an exhibition that will be held at the JCB at the end of the semester on the theme of Race and Indigeneity in the Americas. The assignments and their evaluation are described in detail on the course website.

- Assignment 1: Description 20% (700-900 words, about 20 hours)
- Assignment 2: Context 20% (700-900 words, about 20 hours)
- Assignment 3: Exhibition 20% (about 30 hours)

Readings

50 pages per week, [about 4-6 hours](#).

You are not required to purchase any books for this course. All readings are available as PDFs via canvas or online through provided links. We recommend but do not require that you print the readings in advance of each class meeting.

Evaluation

Grading: A (90+), B (80+), C (70+), NC

Minor assignments are worth 40% of your grade and will be evaluated on a credit/no-credit scale. You will receive credit if you submitted on time, followed the instructions, and show evidence of thoughtfulness in your work. You may skip up to three minor assignments.

Major assignments are worth 60% of your grade (20% each) and will be evaluated according to the guidelines available on the course website. We will consider the following aspects of your work:

- Completion: did you complete the task on time and as described in the assignment?
- Quality: Does the work demonstrate excellence in the skills being evaluated in this assignment?
- Process: did you go through the peer review process and incorporate it into your work?

Contesting a grade

If you believe there was an error made in the evaluation of any of your work (i.e. bad math), please let us know immediately.

If you believe that a major assignment has been unfairly evaluated, you must a) submit a one-page explanation in which you refer specifically to the evaluation guidelines as described in

the assignment and b) schedule a meeting to discuss your grade. Grades for minor assignments cannot be contested.

Expectations for Student Engagement

Preparation

Over 14 weeks, students will spend 2.5 hours in class per week (35 hours), plus 5-7 hours on readings and responses (70-98 hours). In addition, there are four out-of-class assignments, estimated to take about 73 hours over the course of the semester. This averages to about 15 hours total per week.

Digital Interaction

Course Website:

- Updated schedule
- Links to readings and related materials
- Assignment instructions, rubrics, etc.

Canvas

- PDFs of assigned readings
- Assignment submission
- Email communication

Submitting Assignments

- Weekly reading reflections should be submitted via Canvas by Sunday on the week they are due.
- All other written assignments should be submitted via Canvas by 3pm on the day they are due. You may have a grace period until midnight of that day if you are unable to meet this deadline.
- Assignments should be uploaded in the form of .docx, .pdf, or .rtf.

Due Dates & Late Work

No late work will be accepted. Practice meeting deadlines (your future clients, employers, family members, etc. will expect you to meet stated deadlines). Exceptions may be made in the case of illness or an emergency. Contact the professors as soon as you are able to discuss your particular situation.

If you are struggling or feel that you are falling behind *for any reason*, the best thing you can do is speak with an instructor. There is no penalty for asking for help.

Attendance & Participation

Engaged attendance during all class periods is expected but will not be evaluated. Because much of the course is hands-on, if you do not attend class, you will be less able to achieve the course goals.

Classroom Policies

- Bring a laptop or notebook to class. Electronics are allowed in this classroom. Resist checking your email or social media, but if you do tweet, be aware that instructors may follow you. Use #JCBBookHistory to share your experiences in this class.
- Bring a printout of the reading (recommended) or PDF.
- Bring a camera or smartphone if you want to take pictures of books!

Working with Rare Books in the Classroom

- **Wash your hands** before coming to class / using rare materials. Only handle items with clean, dry hands.
- **Pencils only** when rare books are out. Please use pencils, bookmarks, and book weights provided.
- **No food and drink** are permitted in the classroom when rare books are in use. (Water in sealed bottles is okay when the books aren't out.)
- Handle items as little as possible.
- Rare books must be used with the provided book supports. Please do not mark, lean on, or write on top of rare materials.
- Do not rearrange items in boxes.
- Foldout maps and illustrations should be opened by staff. Please ask for assistance.

Respect & Generosity of Spirit

Brown University admits students representing a range of life experiences, personal and cultural identities, and religious and political beliefs. Students who enroll in this class are encouraged to express their own experiences and perspectives and also to pay close attention to the experiences and perspectives of others. In class, students are requested to interact respectfully with one another and the instructor, allowing each other to complete their thoughts without interruption, asking clarifying questions before jumping to conclusions, acknowledging that there are multiple sides to most disagreements, and assuming that everyone speaks with good intentions.

Discriminatory Language.

While students are encouraged to express their viewpoints, there is no room in this classroom for language that conveys hostility toward other people (whether they are present in the classroom or not) because of their perceived race, gender identity, sexual orientation, class,

and/or citizenship status. Students who use discriminatory language will be approached by the instructor for a discussion about the sources and consequences of their language. Students who continue to use discriminatory language will be asked to leave class meetings and/or withdraw from the course.

Course Policies

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to abide by Brown's academic code, which can be found here: http://www.brown.edu/Administration/Dean_of_the_College/curriculum/academic_code.php

A student's name on any exercise (e.g., a theme, report, notebook, performance, computer program, course paper, quiz, or examination) is regarded as assurance that the exercise is the result of the student's own thoughts and study, stated in his or her own words, and produced without assistance, except as quotation marks, references, and footnotes acknowledge the use of printed sources or other outside help.

Accommodations

Brown University is committed to full inclusion of all students. Please inform me early in the term if you have a disability or other conditions that might require accommodations or modification of any of these course procedures. You may speak with me after class or during office hours. For more information, please contact [Student and Employee Accessibility Services](#) at 401-863-9588 or SEAS@brown.edu. Students in need of short-term academic advice or support can contact one of the deans in the Dean of the College office.

Please assert requests for accommodations often and early. It is never too late to request accommodations – our bodies and circumstances are continuously changing. You will not be asked to disclose personal medical information to the professors. You will, however, be asked to make use of formal accessibility services on campus.

Student Support

The Student Support Services Deans provide 24-hour crisis services for undergraduate, graduate, and medical students with personal or family emergencies, and are available by appointment to consult with individual students about their personal questions/concerns, thus allowing students to succeed and thrive in their academic pursuits.

<https://www.brown.edu/offices/student-support/student-support-services>

Sexual Assault & Harassment Prevention

Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender are Civil Rights offenses subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, etc. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you can find the appropriate resources below. Note that professors, academic advisers, staff members, and resident assistants are considered “Responsible employees.” This means if they are provided with enough detail of the situation, they are obligated to report the situation to Title IX. The only employees of the University that have the privilege of private and confidential support on campus are licensed mental health practitioners (i.e. licensed clinical social workers, licensed counselors, psychologists, psychiatrists) at [Counseling and Psychological Services](#) and medical staff.

[Campus Sexual Assault Resources](#) (confidential).

Sexual Assault Response Line, 401.863-6000 (confidential).

[SHARE Advocates in BWell Health Promotion](#) (confidential support). (brown.edu/bwell, 401.863-2794, 3rd floor of Health Services).