Spring 2025 F+ block

Eaton Hall, 215 Tu/Th 12:00-1:15pm

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**Uncovering the Past: Historical Sociology in the Digital Age**

**Soc 149-1. v1.1**



What is Historical Sociology? This course explores the challenges faced by the disciplines of both History and Sociology in a digital era. It examines the different ways in which historical sociologists have drawn from or rejected their parent disciplines in the past, and how they are trying to meet the new challenges posed by a globalized, digital world, to develop creative research strategies and to preserve historical records.

The course is designed to teach students how to uncover traces of the past left in historical materials ranging from diaries, art and music to government documents and company records, and thus illuminate aspects of human lives that would otherwise remain obscure. Students will learn how to assess conflicting accounts of events left by artists, scientists, artists, politicians, soldiers and ordinary people – histories from loss as well as the more conventional history written by “winners.”

We begin by locating archives and oral histories created in different times and places across the globe to preserve historical records. We will explore how to track down materials from a variety of sources, employing techniques such as Freedom of Information requests. Students will then learn how make such data accessible, for example, by using advances in text recognition and data cleaning, conducting press reviews and automating the transcription of audio files. Finally, to manage the unmanageable we will introduce a variety of tools and methods to organize and analyze qualitative data. We will consider the ethics of historical research, as well as the social, political and historical importance of archives, their curation and their future.

**Degree Requirements**

For Tufts degree requirements: this course fulfills the Social Scienceand Humanities (in process) distribution requirement. It also fulfills an elective requirement for the History major and the Digital Humanities minor in addition to the Sociology major.

**Assignments**

**Assignments count towards your final grade as follows:**

***Participation:***  attendance and contribution 10%

***Discussion Boards and Research exercises, ongoing*** 45%

***Archival Research/write-up*** [due March 27 after spring break] 20%

***Final integrative paper*** 25%

To achieve a pass in this course, you must achieve a pass in all 4 areas of work

***Instructions for each assignment will be posted on Canvas. Brief descriptions follow:***

**1. Participation:** is an essential component of the course. Therefore, your attendance, preparation, and engagement are essential components. Participation is worth 10% of your course grade. You will be evaluated on your attendance, the quality of your preparation and involvement in discussion and discussion boards, your posts and commentaries. We hope to see evidence of intellectual curiosity, hard work, the ability to critique ideas thoughtfully and to re-assess your own assumptions and arguments. It entails the following:

Participation involves showing up (as in possible misquotation of Stephen Hawking, "Half the battle is just showing up"), and participating in class. This means attending, listening to and encouraging others as well as talking yourself. Sometimes, if you have already spoken more than once, you might wait for a couple of questions to let others participate. To ensure continuity, attendance at all sessions is required of participants. Material should be read/watched before each class session because the instructors will often lead a discussion rather than lecture.

The successful conduct of any course depends upon a spirit of mutual respect and cooperation among the participants. Spirited debate on the issues is an integral part of the learning process. We will work together in class and online to create space for the expression of different perspectives. In this sense, academic freedom is a collective responsibility.

***Absences:*** More than two absences will affect your final grade.

**2. Research Exercises and Discussion Boards**: Uncovering the Past. You will be asked to post brief commentaries on the material – guidelines will be provided. This is to encourage you to think critically about course material rather than simply summarizing it.

Discussion boards are designed to provide you with another avenue for participation and to encourage collective conversation.

A series of exerciseswill allow you to practice the various tools, techniques and methodsof research you will encounter in this course

***NOTE: Effort and engagement count!*** All the assignments above are designed to help you engage with the course material and learn some skills. Therefore, although exercises etc. may have rubrics assigning points, you will also have the opportunity to redo work.

Please submit any revisions or additions no later than 1 week after the original due date, and notify us by email of any resubmission.

**3. Archival Research**

Choose a historical topic that interests you. Spend at least two afternoons in one or two archives doing research in a Boston area archive (we will provide suggestions). There are many archives in the Boston area including the rare book rooms of our great libraries. Then write a short paper describing the process through which you selected an archive, your experience at the archive and what you learned there that you might not have through the normal channels of library work.

**4. Final Integrative Paper**

You will be provided with a question that asks you to synthesize and reflect on what you have learned about historical sociology and historical research in this course

**Guidelines**

***Use of generative AI (e.g., chatGPT)***: you may use AI tools for your learning, just as you can collaborate with your peers for things such as brainstorming, getting feedback or revising your own work. However, you may not submit any work generated by an AI program as your own - this means when drafting your project outline or drafts, the language, words, and structure should be generated by you, not an AI tool.

Cite all AI tools when used or referred to in assigned work. See [How to Cite ChatGPT from the APA](https://apastyle.apa.org/blog/how-to-cite-chatgpt) & [How to Cite Generative AI from the MLA](https://style.mla.org/citing-generative-ai/).

***Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:*** Tufts University is committed to providing equal access and support to all students. If you need accommodation as a result of a documented disability, please contact the StAAR Center at [StaarCenter@tufts.edu](mailto:StaarCenter@tufts.edu) or 617-627-4539 to make an appointment. Please be aware that accommodations cannot be enacted retroactively, making timeliness important. And even if you do not have a documented disability, remember that other support services are available to all students.

***Academic Support at the StAAR Center:*** The StAAR Center (formerly the Academic Resource Center and Student Accessibility Services) offers a variety of resources to all students (both undergraduate and graduate) in the Schools of A&S, Engineering, the SMFA and Fletcher; services are free to all enrolled students. Students can seek support to work on any writing-related project or assignment, attend subject tutoring in a variety of disciplines, or meet with an academic coach to hone fundamental academic skills like time management or overcoming procrastination. You can make an appointment for any of these services by visiting [go.tufts.edu/StAARCenter](file:///C:\Users\rtaylor\Document2\0000-Epidemics%20sp21\Syllabus\go.tufts.edu\StAARCenter).

***Academic integrity: Please familiarize yourself with Tufts’ Academic Integrity Handbook***

Academic dishonesty can take many forms and we don’t propose to list all the things you should not do – the handbook is clear about definitions of plagiarism, copying exams etc. Changing technology and practices raise new issues for our class:

***Use of technology***

* Please do not come to class and try to skim through readings on an electronic device – print out your notes or bring a handwritten version.
* All phones should be turned off and put away during class except when required for class exercises; emailing, texting or recording is not permitted. This will help avoid distraction and allow you, your classmates, and us to focus better on the learning at hand.
* Many colleagues do not permit the use of laptops etc. for similar reasons. We propose the following contract: that laptops and tablets can be used only for class-related purposes such as taking notes, or participating in the course. If the contract starts to break down it will be revoked.

***Tufts Policy on sharing:*** This course is designed for everyone to feel comfortable participating in discussion, asking questions, learning, and facilitating the learning of others. In order for that atmosphere to be maintained, any recordings of our conversations will be shared only with the enrolled students in the class (not posted publicly) and it is prohibited for any of us who have access to the video or recording to share it outside the course. Similarly, we have specifically designed the syllabus, exams, handouts, and lectures for the people who are enrolled in the course this term and those may not be shared outside this course. It is against Tufts policy for anyone to share any content made available in this course including course syllabi, reading materials, problems sets, videos, handouts, and exams, with anyone outside the course without the express permission of the instructor. This especially includes any posting or sharing of videos or other recordings on publicly accessible websites or forums. Any such sharing or posting could violate copyright law or laws that protect the privacy of student educational records.

***Sociology Department Late policy***

All written assignments should be submitted by the due date and time. Late assignments will be docked one third of a letter grade for each day late (ie. if an assignment is turned in one day late, a grade of A- would become B+).

*Modification:*  For this course you can miss a deadline 3 times without penalty (by not more than 36 hours).

*Minor Illness or Standard Outside Obligations:*  Exceptions for assignments will generally not be granted for minor illnesses or standard outside obligations, including work, performances, job interviews, games, and so forth. If you have a question about whether your circumstance qualifies, please ask at least 1 week in advance. Extenuating circumstances are more likely to be considered with advance notice rather than at the last minute.

*Major Illness or Emergencies or any Ongoing Issues:*  If you have ongoing issues (i.e., chronic or mental or physical health conditions), please speak either to the StAAR Center or to your advising dean and we will be happy to work with them to put a plan in place. Such unavoidable events or absences will not affect your grade.

**COURSE OUTLINE AND READING LIST**

Readings will be available on-line on Canvas. The instructors may make changes to the syllabus in response to participants’ interests and feedback, our sense of how things are going, or world events. Any changes will be discussed in class and announced via email, so please check your inbox for this class even if you live the rest of your life on your phone.

**I. Orientation**

**Week 1 (January 16):** **Introduction: History and Sociology. What do historians and sociologists do and how do they think?**

Carr, Edward Hallett. *What Is History?* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961): Chapter 1: “The Historian and His Facts”

Check out one of the numerous history discussion lists eg. *the History New Network*: http://historynewsnetwork.org/article/category/2

***Exercise: Choose one entry in the discussion list and discuss how the author views the role of the historian (your post should be no longer than 300 words)***

**Week 2 (January 21): Introduction continued: What is the sociological imagination?**

Mills, C. Wright. *The Sociological Imagination.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) Ch.1 “The Promise”

**Week 2 (January 23): Introduction continued: Historical Sociology - a happy marriage?**

Abrams, Philip. *Historical Sociology* (Cornell University Press, 1982): Ch.1 “Introduction: Sociology as History”

Carr, Edward Hallett. *What Is History?* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961): Chapter 2 “Society and the Individual”

Class discussion: Compare the frameworks of Wright Mills, and Carr for analyzing the relationship between individual experiences and broader social structures.

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***Discussion Board Post:*   
*Prompt:*** Based on the required readings, choose a historical event or narrative and evaluate how the perspectives of Carr, Mills and Abrams might reinterpret or challenge that narrative.

***Requirements:***Write a post (300–500 words) before **January 28**

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**II. Objectivity, Interpretation, and Causation**

***Discussion Board Post:***

Drawing from the required readings, analyze a historical event where objectivity and causation were an issue.

***Requirements:*** Please post (300–500 words) by ***February 7*** and comment on at least two peers’ posts by***February 9***

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**Week 3 (January 28): What does objectivity mean in history and the social sciences?**

Richard Evans “What Is History? – Now” in David Cannadine (ed.) *What is History Now?*

Max Weber, Chapter 2: "Objectivity in Social Science and Social Policy" (*The Methodology of the Social Sciences*)

**Week 3 (January 30): Objectivity and interpretation in history.**

Peter Novick, "Historians on the Home Front,” ch.5 of *That Noble Dream: The ‘Objectivity Question’ and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1988)

**Week 4 (February 4): Objectivity and interpretation in Sociology**

Alice Goffman On the Run: Fugitive Life in an American City (2014): selections

Gideon Lewis-Kraus, “The Trials of Alice Goffman,” *New York Times Magazine* (12 January, 2016)

**Week 4 (February 6): Historical Legacies: Whose theory? What theory?**

Charles Tilly, “Universalizing Comparisons,” in *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1989): chapter 6

Compares historians and sociologists’explanations of revolutions (Theda Skocpol)

Peter Baldwin, “Clio Intervenes: The Effect of The Past on Public Health”, *Disease and Democracy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2005): chapter 10

Historians as theoretical thieves

**III Identity, Narrative, and Representation**

***Discussion Board Post:***Based on the required readings, analyze a historical narrative related to identity (e.g., a marginalized group or transnational identity) and evaluate how the perspectives of 2 of the authors in section III might reinterpret or challenge that narrative. Reference Trouillot to support your analysis.***Requirements:***Please post (300–500 words) by ***February 23***

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**Week 5 (February 11): Who owns History?**

Introduction to Appleby at al. *Telling the Truth About History*: 1-12

Edward T. Linenthal, “Anatomy of a Controversy’ (the Enola Gay controversy), ch. 1 of *History Wars* (New York: Henry Holt and Company 1996): 9-62

**Week 5 (February 13): Who Gets to Tell the Story?**

Paul Gilroy, Chapter 1: "The Black Atlantic as a Counterculture of Modernity" *The Black Atlantic*: Modernity and Double Consciousness (1993)

D. Chakrabarty, “Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for ‘Indian’ Pasts?” *Representations* No. 37, Special Issue: Imperial Fantasies and Postcolonial Histories (Winter, 1992), pp. 1-26

**Week 6 (February 18): Who Gets to Tell the Story?**

Alice Kessler-Harris, “What is Gender History Now?” in David Cannadine (ed.) *What is History Now?* (Palgrave Macmillan 2002): 95-112

Justin Bengry, “Can and should we queer the past?” in Carr and Lipscomb *What Is History Now?* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2021): 48-65

Rogers Brubaker, *Trans* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016): 1-68

**Week 6 (February 20): NO CLASS (A real-world Thursday but a Tufts Monday schedule)**

Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Chapter 1: "The Power in the Story" in *Silencing the Past* (Beacon Press; 2nd Revised edition, 2015)

**Week 7 (February 25): Forgotten History and History from Loss**

Heather Curtis and Kendra Field: *Slavery, Colonialism & their Legacies*

Marnie Hughes-Warrington and Daniel Woolf (eds) *History from Loss: A Global Introduction to Histories written from defeat, colonization, exile, and imprisonment* (Routledge, 2023): Introduction.

**IV Finding the Data: Locating Historical Materials and Primary Sources**

*“Archival materials are among the few resources we have available for learning about past events”* (Ventresca and Moore)

**Week 7 (February 27): The Allure of the Archives**

Arlette Farge *The Allure of the Archives*: excerpt

***Presentation:*** Overview of local resources, libraries and archives

**Week 8 (March 4): Digitization: Everything is Available?**

Adam Crymble, *Technology and the Historian* (2021) Ch. 2 “The Archival Revisionism of Mass Digitization”.

***Everything is Not Available?*** How to conduct Freedom of Information searches and requests: a UK/US comparison

* **US:** <https://researchguides.library.tufts.edu/c.php?g=249313&p=6824938>

***Presentation:*** on acquiring emails from participants in the Flint water scandal

***Guest speaker:*** lawyer on fielding FOI requests about 9/11, often conspiracy theories

* **UK:** <https://www.gov.uk/search/transparency-and-freedom-of-information-releases?content_store_document_type=foi_release&keywords=>

WhatDoTheyKnow (a site by mySociety designed to help people in the United Kingdom make Freedom of Information requests)

***Presentation:*** on the British National Archives

**Week 9 (March 6): Organizations/company records (ancient and modern)**

*Few official actions of any sort are conceived, enabled, or enacted without having been written down both in advance, in retrospect, and invariably several more times in between. Organizational texts thus represent forms of social discourse - literally, ways of communicating, producing, and enacting organizational life* (Ventresca and Mohr 2002 Archival Research Methods)

***Guest speaker*** on transcribing ledgers (in Russian, Polish and Yiddish) by Jews who were not supposed to be working in the banking sector in the Russian Empire late 1800s, held in Ukrainian and other archives.

**IV. Making the invisible visible: How to access and make usable archived and historical materials**

**Week 9 (March 11): Reading Texts: Digital Humanities**

*The Alexiad:* the history of Byzantine Emperor Alexius I Comnenus (reigned 1081–1118) said to

be written by his daughter, Anna Comnena

***Presentation:*** Using Voyant tools

**Week 9 (March 13): Text Recognition and Retrieval**

Ian Milligan, *History in the Age of Abundance?* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019): Ch 1, “Exploding the Library.”

***Presentations:***

*Retrieving Information from Images: Optical Character Recognition (OCR)*

*Retrieving Information from the Internet Archive*

*Retrieving Information from Audio: Automated Speech Recognition (ASR)*

**Week 10 (March 18 and 20): NO CLASS. SPRING BREAK**

**Week 11 (March 25): Availability is not accessibility:** Tuskegee – Science and Race

*Miss Evers Boys.*  [Film -Reading List section on Canvas]. Fictionalized account of the Tuskegee Scandal. ***Please watch before class***

Susan Reverby, chapter from *Examining Tuskegee (*University of North Carolina press 2009)

***Presentation*** on exploring open data: Document Collection from Untreated Syphilis Study at Tuskegee now publicly available through National Library of Medicine (NLM): <https://collections.nlm.nih.gov/catalog/nlm:nlmuid-2934097R-root>

**Week 11 (March 27): What Can the Press Tell Us?**

Allen and Sieczkiewicz , “How Historians use Historical Newspapers” *Proceedings of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 47, 1 (November 2010)

Regina G. Lawrence, “Framing Obesity: The Evolution of News Discourse on a Public Health Issue”, *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, vol. 9, no.3 (summer 2004): 56-75

***Presentations:*** Three strategies for searching the press and constructing a press review. Attention to challenges in the era of AI

**Week 12 (April 1):**  ***Class Discussion:***  Do digital tools democratize or complicate historical research?

**V. Managing the unmanageable: how to organize and analyze qualitative data**

**Week 12 (April 3): Intellectual/Cultural History: Measuring Culture**

Maza, Sarah. "Stories in history: cultural narratives in recent works in European history." *The American Historical Review* 101, no. 5 (1996): 1493-1515.

John Mohr et.al, *Measuring Culture* by ch.2 “Measuring culture in Objects” or ch.1 “Measuring culture in People.

**Week 13 (April 8): Narrative History: Reading Primary Documents.**

Peter Brown, “The Invisible Companion,” ch.3 of *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (University of Chicago Press, 1981)

Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History,* chapter 2

**Week 13 (April 10): Understanding Trends from Big Data: Data Politics**

Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, chapter 1

***Presentations:***

* Topic modeling archival newspapers on the 1918-19 influenza pandemic
* Strategies for analyzing Covid materials

**Week 14 (April 15): Leveraging Social Networks for Qualitative Analysis.**

Nadel, P., Smith, K.M. Reconstructing decision-making dynamics during public health crises by applying data science to public records. *J Public Health Pol* (2024).

**Week 14 (April 17): Qualitative coding and grounded theory**

* Overview of grounded theory and various QDA softwares.
* Introduction to the qualitative software package Nvivo
* Possibly: Using semantic search

**VI. Data Stewardship and the Future of Historical Research**

**Week 15 (April 22): Preserving and sharing archival data: methods, ethics and controversies**

Center for Art Law (2024-5-15) *Trends in Repatriation of Cultural Objects from US Museums*

*Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation of 1990* (NAGPRA): chapter 32

***Presentation***s:

* Returning artifacts from museums and collections.
* Sharing data on Covid in wastewater with indigenous communities.

**Week 15 (April 24): Final Reflections: The future of historiography and historical sociology in a**

**globalized, digital world.**

Bowker, Geoffrey C. "Commentary: Reading the Endless Archive." *The Digital Imaginary: Literature and Cinema of the Database* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020): 95–100.