

HIST 5370: Research Seminar in U.S. History / “Biography as U.S. History”
Department of History / Fall 2018 / CRN 17567

Dr. Jeffrey P. Shepherd

Class Location: LART 322 / Wednesdays 5:00 – 7:50

Office Hours: LART 326 / Tuesdays 10:30 – 12:00 & Wednesdays 2:00 – 3:30 & by appointment

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Course Overview

This research seminar focuses on biography and the ways in which the lives of individuals help us understand big questions, themes, and debates in U.S. History. Students will read several biographies of people from a range of backgrounds, regions, and eras; with an eye towards the experiences of people of color, subaltern groups, and those who have fought against discrimination and marginalization. Through these biographies we will investigate how gender, race, class, sexuality, citizenship, national identity, and political ideology function in U.S. History. We will also grapple with the methodological, conceptual, and theoretical challenges posed by doing biography and using it as a window into the past. The driving questions of the class include, but are not limited to, the following: Is the scale of biography “too small” or can it “personalize” large and impersonal historical forces? Does biography privilege the elite, who typically left behind troves of documents or can methodologies such as oral history help us understand the lives of under-represented groups? Does “biography as a window” into an era, group, or issue seem like a reasonable standard or are individuals and identities too unique to be representative of larger groups or categories?

The course will incorporate foundational research skills and the main steps in the research process, from identifying a historical question, to writing an abstract and outline, to gathering and organizing notes, and peer reviewing drafts. In addition, students will investigate sources of funding for their research, journals for publishing their work, and conferences in which they could present their papers. Students will present their findings orally, in a conference-like setting. Students enrolled in this course may use the paper they write to contribute to an MA Paper or Thesis, or a dissertation chapter.

Reading List

- Chana Kai Lee. *For Freedom's Sake: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer*. (University of Illinois Press, 2000). ISBN-10: 0252069366
- Judy Tzu-Chin Wu. *Doctor Mom Chung of the Fair-haired Bastards: The Life of a Wartime Celebrity*. (University of California Press, 2005). ISBN-10: 0520245288
- Karl Jacoby. *The Strange Career of William Ellis: The Texas Slave Who Became a Mexican Millionaire*. W.W. Norton and Company, 2017. ISBN-10: 0393354172
- Paul R. McKenzie-Jones. *Clyde Warrior: Tradition, Community, and Red Power*. (University of Oklahoma Press, 2015). ISBN-10: 0806147059
- Matthew J. Garcia. *From the Jaws of Victory: The Triumph and Tragedy of Cesar Chavez and the Farm Worker Movement*. (University of California Press, 2014). ISBN-10: 0520283856
- Trova Hefferman. *Where the Salmon Run: The Life and Legacy of Billy Frank, Jr.* The University of Washington Press, 2012. ISBN-10: 0295993405
- Randy Shilts. *The Mayor of Castro Street: The Life and Times of Harvey Milk*. (St. Martin's Griffin, 2008). ISBN-10: 0312560850
- Linda Gordon. *Dorothea Lange: A Life Beyond Limits*. (W.W. Norton, 2010). ISBN-10: 039333905X

Additional articles and chapters will be included in the syllabus and available through J-Stor

COURSE EXPECTATIONS AND POLICIES

➤ **Engagement and Participation**

Historical research, though sometimes conducted in solitude, actually requires engagement with a community of scholars. To that end, students are encouraged to regularly participate in discussions about the readings and the issues associated with the class. We will have regular “peer reviews” of assignments, grapple with compelling books about interesting people, and struggle with the place of “an individual” in the vast tapestry of the past. Indeed, history as “the past” and as a discussion about how we as individuals and members of a community construct that past, is political, and therefore highly contentious. When engaged in volatile topics we must remain cognizant of opposing viewpoints, underlying meanings, the complex implications of our personal viewpoints, and the highly charged world in which we live. We must respect free speech while simultaneously guarding against hateful speech and discourse that unnecessarily inflames, especially while lacking intellectual purpose or content.

➤ **Professional Conduct and Academic Honesty**

As graduate students and members of the historical profession, we must maintain high standards of behavior, ethics, and respect. Productive intellectual communication and engagement stems from empathy and serious discussion about issues, theories, methods, history, and contemporary politics. Aggressive and demeaning behavior is not appropriate to the profession or the culture of learning we seek to stimulate in this class and department: it impedes intellectual discussion and hampers the educational-academic goals of all students. Students violating these expectations will receive reasonable warning until the instructor deems the behavior worthy of University attention.

According to the American Historical Association and the UTEP Handbook of Operating Procedures, plagiarism and academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. The Department of History Program Guidelines prohibit all forms of cheating, plagiarism, misrepresentation, and unlawful use of others’ information without proper citation and acknowledgment. Suspected violations will be submitted to the Office of the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs, with punitive actions ranging up to expulsion from the program and university. See: Section II: Student Affairs, Chapter 1: Student Conduct and Discipline, 1.3 Student Standards of Conduct through 1.3.1.3, of the Handbook of Operating Procedures.

(<http://admin.utep.edu/LinkClick.aspx?link=HOOP-Section+II.pdf&tabid=30181&mid=63285>)

➤ **Professional Development and Career Diversity**

The American Historical Association (<https://www.historians.org/>) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (<https://www.neh.gov/>) have been working on overlapping efforts to expand the professional horizons of history and humanities PhD graduates to include employment outside of the classroom and academia. Similarly, departments such as ours, through a grant from the AHA, have become increasingly aware of the need to address with greater intentionality skill sets beyond teaching and research. These skill sets, outlined below, speak to myriad professional “proclivities” and “good habits” that historians should develop even though PhD programs sometimes fail to consciously incorporate them into graduate coursework, mentoring, and advising.

- Communication (presentation and public speaking skills, sharing research, teaching)
- Quantitative skills (grant writing and budgeting, financial management)
- Collaboration (cooperation with groups from varied backgrounds)
- Intellectual confidence (independence of mind, willingness to try new things, experiment)
- Digital literacy (digital humanities, social media, etc.)
- Problem Solving (being resourceful, creatively addressing problems, overcoming obstacles)
- Professional networking and outreach (building a community of scholars resources)

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS AND ASSESSMENT

General Participation and Attendance (50 pts)

- Attendance is mandatory. You have one unexcused absence, but two or more absences are grounds for dismissal from the class. Please arrive on time and stay until the end of class. You are encouraged to ask and answer questions, offer thoughts and ideas, and engage each other and the material. Disagreements are fine as long as they are respectful and purposeful. Throughout the semester we will have ample opportunity to work together collaboratively on the research and writing process. These moments of cooperation contradict the popular image of historians working alone, hunched over manuscripts in a lonely archive. In fact, historians rely greatly on academic networks, friends and professional colleagues to improve their work. Thus, we will share our ideas, collaborate, review each other's work, and support each other.

The Historical Profession and Your Research (25 points)

- "Being a Historian" involves more than conducting research and writing. The profession requires you to present your work at conferences, publish, find grants, and become a member of a scholarly community. In this course you will identify a conference and consider submitting your paper to it: write an abstract and proposal, create a short CV, etc. Additionally, you are required to locate a journal in which you would potentially submit your paper for publication. Finally, visit the websites for the American Historical Association, the Organization of American Historians, and one other organization and learn about their resources for graduate students, research support, and professional development.

Historians Around Us (25 x 2 = 50 points)

- All students must attend one public presentation by a historian or someone presenting work that is closely related to history. Write a 250 word response to the content, argument, conclusions, and general style and approach of the presenter. In addition, "interview" one historian about why they entered the profession, the most pressing research questions in their field/area, and what they think about the promises and perils of biography. Please limit the interview to 30 minutes and write a 500 word synopsis of the conversation.

Communicating and Sharing Historical Research (50 points)

- Communicating and sharing our research is vital for the survival of the profession and discipline. We will make our work accessible through two platforms: a public presentation of approximately 8-10 minutes (per student); and a short article format/blog post of approximately 500 words (with photos and sources). The public presentation will follow a standard conference format. The article/blog post will summarize the main elements of the biography, written for a popular audience. These presentations will be open to the history department and the blog posts will be available to the public.

Critical Response Papers (25 x 4 = 100 points)

- You will write four short papers that critically analyze particular elements of four books. These response papers are not standard academic book reviews; rather, I want you to focus on issues such as methodological approach, documentation and sources; use of oral histories; voice, audience, tone, and style; and/or scholarly argument and historiographical significance. By this I mean I want you to highlight and emphasize one aspect/issue above and beyond the standard format of argument-summary-critique. Each response should be approximately 500 words. Due on the day we discuss the book.

The Research Paper (200 points)

- Your evaluation and assessment for the research paper is based largely on the **process** of research, writing, peer review, and revision. The result of this process will be a 17-25 page long research paper that is grounded in archival material and primary sources, and that speaks to the methodological, historiographical, and conceptual issues we have discussed in class. The paper must offer a significant contribution to the literature and have a clear argument/thesis statement. For extended discussion of the expectations for this paper, please see the **separate instructions distributed in class**.

Although I did not require the class to read books focused on the research process per se, there are several good “how to” books out there. I suggest consulting these.

- Kate Turabian. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. 8th Ed. (University of Chicago Press, 2011) 0226816389
- Wayne C. Booth. *The Craft of Research*. 3rd Ed. Chicago Guides to Writing, Editing, and Publishing. (University of Chicago Press, 2008) 0226065669

Assignments and Grading (475 Total Points)

General Participation and Attendance (50 pts)
 The Historical Profession and Your Research (25 points)
 Historians Around Us (25 x 2 = 50 points)
 Communicating and Sharing Research (50 points)
 Critical Response Papers (25 x 4 = 100 points)
 Research Paper (200 points)

Grading Scale

A = 427 – 475
 B = 380 – 426
 C = 332 – 379
 D = 285 – 331

COURSE SCHEDULE**Week 1 (August 29)****Introductions and Course Overview****Week 2 (September 5)****A Historiography of Biography**

- Readings: Kessler-Harris, “Why Biography?”; Banner, “Biography as History;” Lepore, “Historians Who Love Too Much”
- Assignment: N/A
- Questions to consider: Have you read a biography and what was your reaction? What are your initial thoughts on the challenges and opportunities associated with biography? Who are some people you might want to investigate and why?

Week 3 (September 12)**Racial Borderlands and “Microhistory”**

- Readings: Jacoby, *The Strange Career of William Ellis*
- Assignment: Proposal #1; Possible Critical Response Papers
- Questions to consider: Considering William Ellis did not leave behind very many archival documents/primary sources, how does Jacoby narrate Ellis’s life? How does Jacoby use the notion of “passing”?
- Meet in Special Collections, 6th Floor of UTEP Library

- Week 4 (September 19)** **“Pioneers and Firsts:” New Approaches to Old Genres**
- Readings: Wu, *Doctor Mom Chung of the Fair-Haired Bastards*;
 - Zinsser, “Feminist Biography: A Contradiction of Terms?”
 - Assignment: Possible Critical Response Papers
 - Questions to consider: Although Dr. Margaret Chung was the first American born woman of Chinese descent to obtain a medical degree, how does Wu move beyond the “pioneers and firsts” paradigm? How does Wu utilize Chung’s unpublished autobiography? How does Wu approach the intersectionality of race, class, sexuality, and nationality?
 - Meet in computer classroom, room 204B, UTEP Library
- Week 5 (September 26)** **Behind the Lens of Iconic Images**
- Readings: Gordon, *Dorothea Lange*
 - Assignment: Possible Critical Response Papers
 - Questions to Consider: How does Gordon illuminate the differences between Lange as “the photographer of the Dust Bowl,” with Lange as the feminist, professional, artist? Considering Lange was a relative elite in the U.S., can Gordon effectively use her life as a window into American social history? To what effect?
- Week 6 (October 3)** **Oral Histories and Questions of Power and Voice**
- Readings: Hefferman, *Where the Salmon Run*; Valandra, “The As-Told-To Native [Auto]biography”
 - Assignments: Proposal #2; Possible Critical Response Papers
 - Questions to consider: How does Hefferman address issues associated with power and voice, authorship, and ownership of narrative? What are some of the strengths and challenges associated with a cooperative project like this? Does Hefferman successfully convey Frank’s contributions to protecting Indigenous treaty rights?
 - Individual Meetings by this week*
- Week 7 (October 10)** **“Gone Too Soon:” Biographies of Young Activists**
- Readings: McKenzie-Jones, *Clyde Warrior: Tradition, Community, and Red Power*
 - Assignments: Possible Critical Response Papers
 - Questions to consider: Considering the short life of Clyde Warrior, how does McKenzie-Jones demonstrate his historical significance? What documents does he use and how does he interpret them for Warrior’s contribution to positive social change?
- Week 8 (October 17)** **Critical Perspectives on Movements and Leaders**
- Readings: Garcia, *From the Jaws of Victory: The Triumph and Tragedy of Cesar Chavez and the Farm Worker Movement*; Hearn and Knowles, “Representative Lives? Biography and Labor History”
 - Assignments: Possible Critical Response Papers
 - Questions to consider: Why is Garcia so critical of Cesar Chavez and the Farm Worker Movement? Considering the array of primary sources and interviews he implements, how do you react to his interpretation of an icon and “hero” of the Chicano Movement?

Week 9 (October 24)	Race, Class, and Gender in Biography <ul style="list-style-type: none">•Readings: Kai Lee, <i>For Freedom's Sake: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer</i>•Assignments: Possible Critical Response Papers•Questions to Consider: What does Lee say about the similarities between Hamer's challenges with poverty, racism, and gender discrimination in her personal life AND with the same issues on the state and national level as a civil rights activist?•Note: We will discuss the outline and structure of your paper
Week 10 (October 31)	History, Popular Audiences, and Film <ul style="list-style-type: none">•Readings: Randy Shilts, <i>The Mayor of Castro Street: The Life and Times of Harvey Milk</i>•Assignments: Possible Critical Response Papers: compare and contrast the book, <i>The Mayor of Castro Street</i> with the film, "Milk." Write a popular review that might be published in something like a local newspaper or periodical.
Week 11 (November 7)	Structure, Organization, and Outlines <ul style="list-style-type: none">•Readings: Go back over the books and look at their structure and organization•Assignment: Outline (2 – 4 pages, single spaced, outline format)•Workshop/peer review outlines. Bring two copies to class.
Week 12 (November 14)	Individual Meetings <ul style="list-style-type: none">•I will return your outlines and we will talk about your papers
Week 13 (November 21)	First Draft <ul style="list-style-type: none">•Meet in class and workshop/peer review the first draft
Week 14 (November 28)	Refining the Paper/Discuss Presentations <ul style="list-style-type: none">•I will return your papers and discuss some issues to help you prepare the final papers. We will discuss the presentations and the short summaries/blogposts.
Week 15 (December 5)	Final Presentations <ul style="list-style-type: none">•Each student will present their papers in a formal, standard conference format. Your presentations should be 8-10 minutes. I suggest that you write the presentation or at least organize it as bullet points/notes. If you write it out, the presentation should be 3 – 4 pages long, double-spaced. You can use this version to help you with the short article/blogpost and vice versa.
December 12	Final Papers due to me via email