History 290
Historical Methods
Fall 2005

Dr. Kevin B. Sheets
214-B Old Main
753-2060
sheetsk@cortland.edu

Old Main G-24
Mondays 4:20 to 6:50
3.0 Credit Hours

Office Hours:
Mondays and Wednesdays, 1:30 to 3:00
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:30 to 2:30 and Tuesdays 4:15 to 5:00
And by appointment

Course Description:
Introduction to the profession and practice of history. This course will demand enormous time
and effort on your part. Plan to make it a priority this semester. Your reading load is significant,
and your writing expectations are steep. This class will operate as a seminar. This means that you
are expected to have carefully read the assigned texts before class. In class, you will be expected
to participate fully by volunteering your considered opinions. Remember that HIS 290 is
required for your major and it satisfies one of your Writing Intensive requirements and the
Presentation Skills requirement. This semester, HIS 290 is also a service-learning course. As
such you will be participating in a service learning project (volunteering at least 10 hours of your
time) at either the Cortland County Historical Society or the 1890 House Museum.

Course Readings:
Williams, The Historian’s Toolbox
Gary Nash, History on Trial
C. A. Tripp, The Intimate World of Abraham Lincoln
Turabian, Manual for Writers of Terms Papers, Theses, and Dissertations
Other readings on reserve.

Course Requirements:
Final Examination 20%
5-7 page historical methods review of Tripp’s book on Lincoln 15%
5-7 page critical review of the exhibitions at the 1890 House 15%
8-10 page proposal/report for the Walking Tour of Historic Main Street in Cortland 30%
3-5 page reflective statement on your service learning experience at either the Cortland County
Historical Society or the 1890 House Museum, together with 10 volunteer hours 20%

**I reserve the right to modify the +/- of your final grade to reflect your participation in class
discussions. (For example, a course grade of B- can become a C+ for those who fail to
participate actively and substantively in class. Conversely, a course grade of C+ can become a B-
for those who do participate actively and substantively in class.)
**Course Attendance Policy:**
More than one unexcused absence shall affect your final grade by as much as a third of a letter grade for each absence. Do come!

**Course Policies:**
*No incompletes in the course or extensions on assignments will be given. Plan accordingly.*
*Assignments turned in late shall be docked one letter grade for each day late. Assignments more than 4 days late will receive a zero. Your best bet is to do the work early. Remember that computers break and disks are fallible. Save often and back up your work. Your computer problem is not my problem.*
*You may not take an examination at any other time unless you have a legitimate excuse approved by the College. College policy prohibits you from taking an examination before the date scheduled for the class.*
*I will not discuss with you the grade “you need” in this course. I will assign you the grade you earn. I don’t grade you; I grade the work you do.*
*Do not come to class unprepared to discuss the readings assigned for that day.*
*You must register an email account with Banner Web. I shall communicate with you by e-mail. Your failure to use this account does not constitute an excuse for missing messages (including readings) sent by me. Register an account and check it regularly.*
*It is absolutely imperative that you familiarize yourselves with the College’s policy concerning Academic Dishonesty. Cases of plagiarism will be prosecuted.*
*You must attend two campus lectures: Seymour Hersh on September 13 (Brown Auditorium @ 7:30 p.m.) and Amy Goodman on November 2 (Brown Auditorium @ 6:00 p.m.)*
Course Schedule:
(Don’t get married to this schedule. It will be changing to accommodate guest speakers, the museums we’ll be working with, and the imminent birth of my first child!)

Introductions
Aug. 29

What is History?
Sept. 12
Discuss: Appleby, et. al., “History Makes a Nation” [reserve]
Wilson, “What Was History?” [reserve]
Tuchman, “The Historian’s Opportunity” [reserve]
Williams, The Historian’s Toolbox, Part 1.

History and the Public
Sept. 19
Read: Wallace, “Disney’s America” in Mickey Mouse History [reserve]
Boyer, “Whose History is it Anyway?” in Lilenthal, History Wars [reserve]

History in the Museum
Sept. 26—Meet at the 1890 House Museum (37 Tompkins St.)
Read: Patricia West, “Campaigning for Monticello” in Domesticating History [reserve]
Read: Mike Wallace, “That Hamilton Man” [handout]

Historians and their Sources
Oct. 3—Meet at the Cortland County Historical Society (Corner of Homer and Maple Avenues.)

The History of Everyday Things: Interpreting Material Culture
Oct. 10
Read: Prown, "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method" [reserve]
Smith, "The Material Lives of Laboring Philadelphians, 1750-1800" [reserve]

Fall Break—no class
Oct. 17

From Idea to Article: The Process of Making History
Oct. 24
Read: Sheets, “Antiquity Bound: The Loeb Classical Library as Middlebrow Culture in the Early Twentieth Century” [reserve] and other materials [handouts]
Williams, The Historian’s Toolbox, pp. 49-57.
DUE: 5 page review of 1890 House Museum exhibit

When Historians Disagree: Does it Matter?
Oct. 31—Guest Speaker Dr. Randi Storch
Read: TBA

**Was Lincoln Gay? Interpreting the Evidence**  
Nov. 7  
Read C.A. Tripp, *The Intimate World of Abraham Lincoln*, esp. chapters 1-3 and appendices 1-3.

**The History of Cortland’s Main Street**  
Nov. 14  
Presentations and panel discussion of drafts of your historic walking tour of Cortland’s Downtown.  
**DUE: Rough Draft of Your Walking Tour proposal**

**Biography as History: Case Study of Martha Ballard**  
Nov. 21  
Preview the web site: [http://www.dohistory.org/](http://www.dohistory.org/)  
Read: Ulrich, *A Midwife’s Tale*, Introduction. [reserve]

**Writing History: Right, Wrong, and in Between**  
Nov. 28  
Read: Williams, *The Historian’s Toolbox*, pp. 81-149.  
**DUE: 5-7 page historical methods review of Tripp’s Lincoln**

**Teaching History: Is it a Political Act?**  
Dec. 5  
Read: Nash, *History on Trial*

**The Unveiling: Walking Cortland’s Historic Downtown**  
Dec. 12  
Final presentations of your projects at a reception with the History Faculty  
**DUE: Final draft of Walking Tour AND, if you haven’t already given it to me, bring your 3-5 page reflective statement on your service learning project and your signed time sheets.**

**Final Examination**  
Monday, December 19 from 4:20 to 6:50 in our regularly scheduled classroom.

---

If you are a student with a disability and wish to request accommodations, please contact the Office of Student Disability Services located in B-40 Van Hoesen Hall or call 607-753-2066 for an appointment. Information regarding your disability will be treated in a confidential manner. Because many accommodations require early planning, requests for accommodations should be made as early as possible.