

History 3300
The History of Private Life
Spring, 2007

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Please check the WebCT for announcements and grades!

About the Course:

Few of us think that we are making history when we go about the daily business of our lives, caring for children or pets, reading, or cooking. But as you will see in this course history is not something made exclusively by "great men"; it is also made by ordinary people in the everyday course of their lives. Some of the most important historical and cultural transformations--such as the emergence of the modern family or the rise of modern conceptions of privacy and individualism--occurred not as the result of cataclysmic public events, but by the actions of countless individuals in their daily lives.

Traditionally, history has been the story of public life, of diplomacy, economic, politics, and war. This course will shift the focus to life's private side. It will explore the entire realm of private experience from family life, gender roles, and sexuality to manners, leisure activities, fashion, diet, and death. It will demonstrate that even the most mundane and private aspects of our daily experience have a history. It will also show that changes in everyday life are inextricably tied up with a much broader restructuring of the values and beliefs of society as a whole.

To recover this forgotten past, we will look at a wide range of novel kinds of evidence including literature, family papers, domestic architecture, naming patterns, etiquette books, cookbooks, and fashion magazines. Although the English and American experience from the sixteenth century to the present, will be the course's principal concern, the class will place English and American behavior in comparative, cross-cultural perspective.

In the past, many historians mistakenly assumed that the history of private life was either unknowable or else was a chronicle of trivial changes in fashion and custom. This course will show that this view is utterly mistaken. Over the past four centuries, virtually every aspect of English and American life has undergone profound transformations: our speech patterns, our language, our holidays, our manners, our clothing, our homes, our treatment of animals.

The most farreaching changes, however, have taken place in human sensibilities: in our emotions, our moral outlooks, and our sense of self. This class is designed to explain why these changes took place--and also to help you evaluate their moral and cultural meaning.

Online Resources

<http://www.hfac.uh.edu/mintz/privatelife.html>

Required Reading

For the first examination:

Steven Mintz, *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood*, pp. vii-184

For the second examination:

Steven Mintz, *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood*, pp. 185-384

Requirements

Mid-term: A proctored examination which will include multiple choice, identification, and essay questions based on the lectures and readings.

The proctored exam will take place Saturday March 10 from 9-10:30am. Please check the WebCT announcements for the location after the second week of class. Please bring a pen and ID.

Make-up midterms are given at the discretion of Dr. Petrovich. will require documented proof why you missed the test before I agree to give you a make up.

Final: A take-home essay examination based on the lectures and readings. The take-home final is included at the end of this syllabus. The final is DUE NO LATER THAN MAY 1 AT 3PM.

Due Date: May 1 by 3 pm

Location: AH523. Please print a copy on plain white paper and reserve a copy for your records. LATE FINALS ARE NOT ACCEPTED.

Each exam counts for half your final grade.

Calendar of Topics

Week 1 / The Civilizing Process

Topics:

Introduction

The History of Manners

Week 2 / The History of Sex in the West

Topics:

Sexual attitudes and behavior from the classical era to the 19th century

Week 3 / The Making of the Modern Family

Topics:

The History of the Family from the classical era to the 19th century

The Emergence of Modern Conceptions of Individualism

Week 4 / Humans and the Natural World

Topics:

Shifting Philosophical and Religious Views of the Relations between Human, Animals, and the Physical Environment

Week 5 / The Disenchantment of the World

Topics:

The History of Magic, Astrology, Witchcraft Western Religious Traditions and Magic
The Decline of Magical Outlooks

Week 6 / The Discovery of Childhood and Review

Topics:

Abandonment and Abuse of Children in Historical Perspective
The Invention of the Child
Shifting Conceptions of Childrearing

Week 7 / Gender

Topics:

Changing Gender Roles
Shifting Philosophic and Religious Conceptions

Week 8 / Divorce

Topics:

The History of Divorce in Western Culture
Changing Religious Attitudes
Forces for Change

Week 9 / Limiting Births

Topics:

Contraception and Abortion

Week 10 / Western Ways of Death

Topics:

Death and Bereavement in Western Culture
Rituals of Burial and Mourning
Cemeteries

Week 11 / Cleanliness, Smoking, Aging

Topics:

Changing Cultural Concepts of Cleanliness
The History of Smoking
Growing Old

Week 12 / Aging and the Life Course; Consumerism; Mechanization of Everyday Life

Topics:

The History of Adolescence
Age Consciousness in Western Culture
The Emergence of a Consumer Culture
The Rise of the Department Store
Mechanization of Everyday Life

Week 13 / Changing Patterns of Leisure, I

Topics:

The Rise of Modern Sports

Week 14 / Changing Patterns of Leisure, II.

Topics:

The Movies

Week 15 / Private Life in Our Time: The Personal as the Political.

Topics:

Private Life as a Cultural Battleground
Women's Liberation, Gay Liberation, The Family
Values Debate, The New Man

Study Guide for the MIDTERM EXAMINATION:

MANNERS

What did the ancient Greeks and Romans think about privacy?

Did Europeans before the 18th century think about privacy positively or negatively?

What do we mean by the concept of "the civilizing process"?

How, specifically, is this process apparent in the history of manners and etiquette?

SEXUALITY

How does sexuality in humans differ from that in other animals?

What were some of the characteristics of sexuality in 4th and 5th century B.C. Greece?

Why might the level of sexual activity in the past been lower than that reported in 20th century sex surveys?

FAMILY

How has the definition of the word "family" changed over time?

What practices did ancient families permit that families in Christian Europe prohibited?

How did families before the 18th century differ in size, structure, demographic characteristics, function, and psychology from families later in time?

What are the differences between a complex family, a reconstituted family, a consanguineal family, and a nuclear family?

Describe the developments by the late 18th century that illustrate the emergence of the growing importance attached to privacy and the individual.

ANIMALS

Why did Europeans before the 19th century believe that they were superior to animals?

How did the European interpretation of the Biblical story of Creation contribute to a belief in human superiority?

Describe some European taboos about eating certain kinds of animals and explain how these reveal uneasiness about the human relationship with animals.

Why did movements to combat cruelty to animals emerge in the 19th century?

DISENCHANTMENT

Which individuals were most likely to be accused of witchcraft?

How did the medieval church conceive of ghosts?

How did Europeans before the 18th century conceive of fairies?

Describe what astrology is and explain why educated people before the 18th century believed it was plausible.

Explain why belief in astrology declined in the late 17th and early 18th centuries.

CHILDHOOD

How did childrearing and child naming practices in the 16th and 17th century differ from those today?

How did parents deal with such aspects of childrearing during the 17th century such as weaning, treatment of infantile sexuality, punishment, and toilet training?

During the 17th century, when did children typically leave home?

Define swaddling.

How did the demographic conditions of family life in the 17th century differ from those today?

How had attitudes toward children in England and America changed by the late 18th century?

HUCK'S RAFT

What does it mean to describe childhood as a social and cultural construct?

What myths does Huck's Raft seek to refute?

How did childhood in Puritan New England differ from childhood today in terms of conceptions of childhood, demographic circumstances, childrearing practices, and children's everyday experiences?

Why did some colonial New England children choose to remain with their Indian captors?

In what ways did the experience of colonial children contribute to the coming of the American Revolution?

How did attitudes toward and the treatment of children change in the late 18th and early 19th centuries? What accounts for these changes? How did the experience of urban middle-class children differ from that of working-class children, including slave children and farm children?

The History of Private Life Final Examination

Instructions: This is a take-home examination. You are required to write four essays, one from each of the exam's four parts. Your answers must be typed and double-spaced. Each answer must be at least 2 double-spaced typewritten pages in length; a thorough answer will typically require 3 double-spaced typewritten pages. Each essay is worth 25 points.

Due Date: May 1 by 3pm

Location: AH 523. Please turn in a copy printed on white paper.

Part I. Write an essay on ONE of the following three topics:

1. Explain why contemporary American funeral practices do not vary widely and describe the values that contemporary American death practices express.
2. Explain why Americans are averse to dirt and smell. Describe when and why the modern pursuit of cleanliness began and which groups contributed to this campaign over time and why they supported it.
3. Explain why tobacco became a popular drug in western culture.

Part II. Write an essay on ONE of the following two topics:

1. Describe the factors that kept the birth rate in the preindustrial world from reaching the biological maximum; explain why and how Americans beginning in the late 18th century limited births.
2. Explain why a feminist movement emerged during the 19th century.

Part III. Write an essay on ONE of the following three topics:

1. Explain why a new consumer culture arose at the beginning of the 20th century; what needs it met; and offer an assessment of the ways it may have transformed peoples' values and outlook.
2. A remarkable transformation took place in American sports during the middle decades of the 19th century. Describe this transformation and explain why it took place.
3. Describe how films contributed to a shift away from Victorian culture; and the functions that films served during the Great Depression, World War II, and the Cold War.

Part IV. Write an essay on the following topic:

The last years of the 19th century and the 20th century witnessed the creation of adolescence, the teenager, scientific childrearing, and youth culture. Describe when and why these developments took place. Also, describe and explain the "panics" that erupted in the 20th century over the changes taking place in young peoples' lives.