

Special Topics: *Game of Thrones*, Television, and Medieval History

COMS 493M HON

HIST 490B HON

Professors Jeffrey Chown and Valerie Garver

Wednesdays 3-5:40

DuSable 418

Contact Information

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This course is sponsored by the University Honors Program as a JHE (Junior Honors Experience). The class will be seminar style with a strong emphasis on discussion format. JHE's are intended to be suitable for Honors students in any major; however, by design, they require a serious investment on the student's part. This particular course will be a hybrid, combining expertise of professors in the History and Communication Studies department.

Learning Outcomes

If students participate in class consistently, complete all assignments, and generally fulfill the requirements of the course, they can expect that they will improve their critical reading and analytical writing skills, improve their ability to engage in critical discussions of texts and television, further their ability to communicate clearly and concisely, and acquire new knowledge of medieval social and political history. Students will also develop sophistication with current developments in long form television production, exhibition, and consumption.

Note Concerning Types of Credit Available for HIST 490B HON

Please note the following concerning HIST 490B HON Special Topics in History: Medieval: If you wish to take this course for credit toward your history major, HIST 490B will fulfill the A Group requirement for the major as well as serve as one of your two required 400-level courses. HIST 490B HON can also count as one of the electives for a History Minor or a Medieval Studies Concentration.

Required Reading

All readings will be available as pdfs on the class Blackboard page, found under Content.

All will also be required to use the standard history department style guide: Diana Hacker's *Pocket Style Manual*, any printed edition *or* the free online versions at:

http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/resdoc5e/RES5e_ch05_o.html

Examples of Chicago Style citations and bibliographic entries:

http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/resdoc5e/RES5e_ch10_s1-0001.html

If students would like some general background on medieval history, Prof. Garver recommends either the tenth or eleventh edition of Judith M. Bennett's *Medieval Europe: A Short History*. For students interested in the ways "Game of Thrones" draws upon the Wars of the Roses, Prof. Garver recommends purchasing and reading in its entirety David Grummitt's *A Short History of the Wars of the Roses*. The first portion of the book will be available on the Blackboard page because it is assigned as class reading.

Assigned Viewings

Students are responsible for securing their own viewings. This may involve buying DVDs or using VOD services such as Amazon.com or HBO.Go. Note there are no textbook costs for this course.

Quizzes

We will start each class with a short written quiz based on the assigned readings for that day. Students should write quizzes in complete sentences. The two lowest quiz scores will be dropped from the average for the semester. For this reason, students may not request a make-up quiz until their third absence, and in those cases they must present documentation for the necessity of their absence. The professors will give make-up quizzes at times and places of their choosing.

Discussion

This course will consist greatly of class discussions. We expect students to participate in these discussions intelligently and consistently. The best comments are those that demonstrate that you have thought carefully and critically about the GOT episodes and assigned readings for the week. In other words, it is quality of your contributions, not their quantity, that counts most heavily toward your participation grade.

Group Presentations:

These will be 30-minute total presentations complete with PowerPoint/Prezi and clips. Groups will be organized with four members. All members should talk in the presentation and share in the research and design. Each student should submit a bibliography of works consulted (this can be a group effort), an outline of the presentation with slide print-outs, and a short self-evaluation. Topics will be:

1. February 4: The Phenomenon of George Martin
2. February 25: The Historical Background of Disability in Medieval Society
3. March 25: The Production Background of GOT: Sets, Animals, Locations, CGI, Budget
4. April 15: Religion and Spiritualism in GOT and its Antecedents
5. April 29: Fan Culture and GOT

Grades for presentations will be done on an individual basis.

Exams

The midterm and final exams will be take-homes written in term paper style. Page count and topics TBA.

Plagiarism, the representation of the words or ideas of others as one's own, is fraud. To avoid plagiarism writers are obliged to give credit to others consulted in footnotes and a bibliography. Footnotes or

endnotes are used to acknowledge the sources of direct quotations, paraphrases of other authors' work, and statistical detail. Page citations and notes not only protect against charges of plagiarism, they also demonstrate that additional support exists for the argument being presented and thus make the work more convincing. They also allow readers to follow up on the work of the author. If there is any question about how to handle borrowed words or ideas, it is the student's responsibility to seek the professors' guidance.

The Importance of Communication

Communication between professor and students is crucial to a successful semester for everyone. We will be pleased to discuss any student concerns, questions, or interests.

Northern Illinois University is committed to providing an accessible educational environment in collaboration with the Disability Resource Center (DRC). Students who need academic accommodations based on the impact of a disability will be encouraged to contact the DRC if they have not done so already. The DRC is located on the 4th floor of the Health Services Building, and can be reached at 815-753-1303 (V) or drc@niu.edu. If you have a documented disability that may have some impact on your work in this class and for which you require accommodations, please see us as soon as possible so that such accommodations may be arranged in a timely manner. All discussions concerning disabilities will of course remain confidential.

Grading: Midterm 15%, Final 20%, Quizzes 25%, Group Presentation 20%, Participation 20%.

Grading Scale:

A:	92.1-100
A-:	90-92
B+:	88-89.9
B:	82.1-87.9
B-:	80-82
C+:	78-79.9
C:	70-77.9
D:	60-69.9
F:	0-59.9

Incompletes: Professor Chown and Professor Garver assign incompletes only in cases of documented extenuating circumstances.

Schedule

Students should complete each reading by the beginning of the class under which it is listed.

Jan 14: Introduction

(Watch episode 1 in class)

Jan 21: Episodes 2 and 3 out of class, #4 in class

(Tom Shippey, "Medievalisms and Why They Matter," *Studies in Medievalism* 17 (2009): 45-54;
"Perils of Generation: Incest, Romance, and the Proliferation of Narrative in Game of Thrones,"
in *The Medieval Motion Picture: the Politics of Adaptation*, ed. Andrew James Johnston and

Phillip Hinz (New York: Palgrave, 2014), 155-170; Andy Greenwald, "Winter is Here," *Grantland*; David Itzkoff, "His Beautiful, Dark, Twisted Fantasy: George RR Martin Talks GOT," *NY Times*.)

Jan 28: Episodes 5 and 6 out of class, #7 in class

(Gerd Althoff, *Friends, Family, and Followers: Political and Social Bonds in Early Medieval Europe*, trans. Christopher Carroll, 2004, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, pp. 102-135, 160-164; John Lanchester, "When Did You Get Hooked?," *London Review of Books*; June Thomas, "How Much Gold is GOT Worth?," *Culture Box*.)

Feb 4: Episodes 8 and 9 out of class, First Group Project

(David Grummitt, *A Short History of the Wars of Roses*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2012, pp. 3-40; Michael Szalay "HBO's Flexible Gold," *Representations* (Skip section on *The News Room* if you haven't seen the show).)

Feb 11: Watch 10, 11 out of class, #12 in class

(Grummitt, pp. 43-82; Russell Meeuf, "The Nonnormative Celebrity Body and the Meritocracy of the Star System: Constructing Peter Dinklage in Entertainment Journalism," *Journal of Communication Inquiry*.)

Feb 18: Watch 13, 14 out of class, #15 in class

(Jonathan Lyon, *Princely Brothers and Sisters: the Sibling Bond in German Politics, 1100-1250*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013, pp. 150-195; Daniel Mendelsohn "The Women and the Thrones," *The New York Review of Books*; "A Game of Numbers: The Business Behind GOT," *Bidness ETC*.)

Feb 25: Watch 16, 17 out of class, Group TWO presentation

(William Chester Jordan, "Famine and Popular Resistance: Northern Europe 1315-22," in *Power, Violence and Mass Death in Pre-Modern and Modern Times*, ed. Joseph Canning, Hartmut Lehmann, and Jay Winter, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004, pp. 13-24; Ilana Krug, "Wartime Corruption and the Complaints of the English Peasantry," in *Noble Ideals and Bloody Realities: Warfare in the Middle Ages*, ed. Niall Christie and Maya Yazigi, Leiden: Brill, 2006, pp. 177-196; Lili Loofbourow, "GOT fails the female gaze: Why does prestige TV refuse to cater erotically to women?," *Salon*.)

Mar 4: **Midterm Exam Due**

Watch 18, 19 out of class, watch #20 in class

(P. J. P. Goldberg, "Childhood and Gender in Later Medieval England," *Viator* 39:1 (2008): 249-262; Sophie Oosterwijk, "The Medieval Child: an Unknown Phenomenon?" in *Misconceptions About the Middle Ages*, ed. Stephen J. Harris and Bryon L. Grigsby, New York: Routledge, 2008, pp. 230-235; Katie Ellis, "Cripples, Bastards, and Broken Things: Disability in GOT," *M/C Journal*.)

Mar 11: Spring Break – No Class

Mar 18: Watch 21, 22, 23, 24 out of class, watch #25 in class

(Janet L. Nelson, "Women at the Court of Charlemagne: A Case of Monstrous Regiment?" in *Medieval Queenship*, ed. John Carmi Parsons, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993, pp. 43-61; Jennifer Ward, *Women in Medieval Europe 1200-1500*, London: Longman, 2002, pp. 110-122; Stacey Goguen, "'There are No True Knights': The Injustice of Chivalry," from *GOT and Philosophy* (Wiley); Tom Holland, "GOT is more brutally realistic than most historical novels.")

Mar 25: Watch 26, 27 out of class, Group THREE presentation

(Frederik Pederson, *Marriage Disputes in Medieval England*, Cambridge: Hambledon Press, 2000, pp. 153-175; Pope Innocent III, Letters on Marriage and Women; Rebecca Jones, "A Game of Genders: Comparing Depictions of Empowered Women between GOT Novel and Television Series," (Student essay); William Rosen, "9 GOT Moments That Actually Happened in History," (Blog).)

Apr 1: Watch 28, 29 out of class, watch #30 in class

(Donald A. Bullough, *Friends, Neighbours, and Fellow Drinkers: Aspects of Community and Conflict in the Early Medieval West*, Cambridge: Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic, University of Cambridge, 1991; "Charli Carpenter, "GOT as Theory," *Foreign Affairs*; Amy Laura Hill, "Torture and Television," *Muslim World*.)

Apr 8: Watch 31, 32 out of class, watch #33 in class

(Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing Unto Others*, 1st edition, New York: Routledge, 2005, pp. 1-5, 87-119; Marcus Schulzke, "Playing the Game of Thrones: Some Lessons From Machiavelli," from *GOT and Philosophy*; David Itzkoff, "Rising Unease Over Rape's Recurring Role," *New York Times*.)

Apr 15: Watch 34, 35 out of class, Group FOUR presentation

(Nithard, *Histories*, trans. Bernhard Walter Scholz, pp. 141-174; Greg Littmann, "Maester Hobbes Goes to King's Landing," from *GOT And Philosophy*; Sady Doyle, "GOT Could Have Been Much Worse," *Huffington Post*.)

Apr 22: Watch 36, 37 out of class, watch #38 in class

(Robert Bartlett, *Trial by Fire and Water: the Medieval Judicial Ordeal*, pp. 1-33; Charters Relating to Judicial Duels; Andrew Romano, "Why We Should Pretend the GOT Rape Scene Never Happened," *The Daily Beast*; Hillary Kelly, Dear Everyone," *The New Republic On-Line*; Margaret Lyons, "Yes, Of Course That Was Rape on Last Night's GOT," *Vulture*.)

Apr 29: Watch 39, 40 out of class, Group FIVE presentation

(Allen J. Frantzen, *Bloody Good: Chivalry, Sacrifice, and the Great War*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003, pp. 149-194; Erin Whitney, "This is What Should Have Happened in That

GOT Rape Scene," *Huffington Post*; Danielle Henderson, "GOT: Too much racism and sexism—so I stopped watching," *The Guardian*; Chris Orr, "GOT Stumbles into Rape," *The Atlantic*.)

Final Exam is due on Monday, 4 May via Safe Assign by 6 p.m. Please note that this due time gives you a ten-minute grace period after the end of our class's final exam slot.