

Easily Distracted

Culture, Politics, Academia and Other Shiny Objects

History 83 What Ifs and Might-Have-Beens, Spring 2011

History 83

What Ifs and Might-Have-Beens

Spring 2011

Professor Burke

TTH 11:20am-12:35pm

Tues Jan 18

Introduction

Contingency, counterfactuals, alternate histories: causality and meaning in history

Theoretical debates

Thurs Jan 20

Tetlock and Parker, "Counterfactual History: Its Advocates, Its Critics, & Its Uses", in *Unmaking the West*

Tues Jan 25

[Johannes Bulhof, "What If? Modality and History", *History and Theory*, 38: 2, 1999.](#)

Thurs Jan 27

E.H. Carr, "What Is History?" [pdf]

Eric Hobsbawm, "Can We Write the History of the Russian Revolution?" [pdf]

(I'll reconstruct E.P. Thompson's "unhistorical shit" comment in class: it's way too wrapped up in a convoluted argument about the Marxist theorist Louis Althusser that would take too much backstory for you all to read and digest.)

Tues Feb 1

[Randall Collins, "Turning Points, Bottlenecks, and the Fallacies of Counterfactual History", *Sociological Forum*, 22:3 2007](#)

[Catherine Gallagher, "When Did the Confederate States of America Free the Slaves?" *Representations* 98, 2007](#)

Thurs Feb 3

Geoffrey Hawthorn, *Plausible Worlds*, Chapter 1. [pdf]

Tues Feb 8

Niall Ferguson, Introduction, *Virtual History*

Thursday Feb 10

Benjamin Aldes Wurgaft, "The Uses of Walter: Walter Benjamin and the Counterfactual Imagination", *History and Theory*, October 2010. [pdf]

Paper discussion: a statement of principle on the counterfactual or alternate history

The embedded use of counterfactuals in scholarship and everyday life

Counterfactuals in practice

Tuesday Feb 15

Selections from Ferguson, *Virtual History*: Ch. 5 & 6

Thurs Feb 17

Selections from Ferguson, *Virtual History*: Ch. 2 & 6

Friday Feb 18

First paper due by 5pm, 5-6 pp.

Tues Feb 22

Selections from Tetlock, Lebow and Parker, *Unmaking the West*, Ch. 2, 4, 10

Thurs Feb 24

Selections from Tetlock, Lebow and Parker, *Unmaking the West*, Ch. 6, 7, 9

Tues March 1

[James Axtell, "Colonial America Without the Indians: Counterfactual Reflections", 73:4 1987, *Journal of American History*.](#)

Thur March 3

[Gary Cornblith, "Rethinking the Coming of the Civil War: A Counterfactual Exercise".](#)

SPRING BREAK

Tues March 15

Cecilia Holland, "Repulse at Hastings" and Caleb Carr, "VE Day", in *What If?* 2 [pdf]

Thurs March 17

Surveying the possibility space: what histories produce counterfactuals, which ones don't, and why?

The recipe book: how to pick and develop a formal counterfactual

Counterfactuals vs. alternate histories

Alternate histories

Tuesday March 22

Ward Moore, *Bring the Jubilee*, pp. 11-54 [pdf]

Floyd Miller, Introduction to Martin Delany, *Blake or The Huts of America*, pp. xx-xxv [pdf]

Robert Sobel, *For Want of a Nail: If Burgoyne Had Won at Saratoga*, pp. 37-54 [pdf]

Thursday March 24

Harry Turtledove, "Must and Shall", in Dozois, ed., *Roads Not Taken* [pdf]

Discussion of 2nd paper assignment.

Tuesday March 29

Jo Walton, *Farthing*

Thursday March 31

Film: "Fatherland"

Friday April 1st
Second paper due by 5pm

Tuesday April 5
Kim Stanley Robinson, *The Years of Rice and Salt*

Thursday April 7
Steven Barnes, *Lion's Blood* [pdf]

Working with Digress.it.

Tuesday April 12
Dale Chace, "A Marriage of Choice" and Connie Wilkins, "The Heart of the Story", in Wilkins, ed., *Time Well-Bent: Queer Alternative Histories* [pdf]

Thursday April 14
Sesshu Foster, *Atomik Aztek*

Tuesday April 19
Scott Westerfeld, *Leviathan* [pdf]
Film: *Sliders*, episode 1

Thursday April 21
Workshopping the final papers: first session

<http://www.alternatehistory.com/>
<http://www.uchronia.net/>

Tuesday April 25
Workshopping the final papers: second session

Thursday April 27
Workshopping the final papers: third session

Final papers due 5pm May 13th

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• Pages

- [Last Collection Speech, Swarthmore, 2002](#)
- [Research Libraries Group/OCLC Programs Talk, June 2007](#)
- [Scholarly Articles](#)
 - [Artificial Societies and Virtual Worlds \(DiGRA 2005\)](#)
 - [HTML version of my DiGRA paper](#)
 - [Play of State: Sovereignty and Governance in MMOGs](#)
- [Syllabi](#)
 - [History 1L The History of Play and Leisure, Spring 2008](#)