

HIS 6934 Theoretical Approaches to Modern European History
Dr. George Williamson

This class will investigate key debates and controversies concerning the nature of history and historical writing, drawing on the works of historians, philosophers, and other theorists from the nineteenth century up to the present. While the many of these theorists are European and/or focused on European history, we will also explore texts by historians and theorists focused on non-European, comparative, or global contexts. Topics include historicism and rise of the historical profession, Hegel's philosophy of history, Marx and Marxist theory, history as "genealogy" (Nietzsche), the Protestant ethic and the "spirit of capitalism" (Max Weber), decisionism and the "political" (Carl Schmitt), social history, history of sexuality (Foucault), gender and its "undoing" (Scott, Butler), memory and trauma (Freud, LaCapra, Saidiya Hartmann), deconstruction and the linguistic turn (Hayden White), postcolonial criticism (Spivak, Chakrabarty), the "anthropocene" and "posthumanism" (Latour). This class does not assume prior familiarity with any of these writers or topics. It proceeds through scaffolded discussions, a series of brief (500-word) written assignments, and two short essays on topics of the student's choosing.