

History and Comics

HTY 221
Fall 2016
Mon, Wed, and Fri, 9:00-9:50 AM
Stevens 375

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Office Hours: Mon and Wed, 10:00-
11:00 AM or by appointment

Course Description:

This course provides a concise introduction to the field of comics studies, and then relies on the comics medium to acquaint students with some of the major topics and themes that are commonly encountered in the discipline of history. Comics are highly accessible and foster active engagement, making it a powerful medium through which to experience the historical discipline. In particular, we will be examining comics as historical documents, but also as a medium for historical analysis. Students will develop the intellectual tools, as they relate to the field of comics studies, required to interpret and criticize the content and meaning of a range of comics materials from the past and present. While it is impossible to cover the whole of the discipline of history, students will be introduced to a wide and varied selection of subject matter, including politics and political discourse, armed conflicts and mass atrocities, nature and the environment, race and ethnicity, Indigenous peoples, labor and the working class, and gender. Prerequisites: none. 3 credits.

General Education Requirements: This course satisfies the Western Cultural Tradition requirement.

Student Learning Outcomes:

Students who successfully complete the course will be able to:

- summarize the constituent elements of the field of comics studies as they relate to the history, form, and culture of comics.
- deconstruct and analyze a range of comics materials, from strips to graphic novels to online content.
- identify the methods used by comics creators to impart meaning and establish a particular narrative.
- describe and discuss various major topics and themes encountered in the discipline of history.
- interpret the content and meaning of a range of comics materials as both historical documents and a medium for historical analysis.
- evaluate and criticize the methods used by comics creators to impart historical meaning and narrative.
- compare, contrast, and debate assorted historical meanings and methods through both oral and written forms of analysis.

Required texts:

Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*
Chester Brown, *Louis Riel: A Comic-Strip Biography*
Randy Duncan, Matthew J. Smith, and Paul Levitz, *The Power of Comics: History, Form, and Culture* (2nd ed.)
Art Spiegelman, *The Complete Maus: A Survivor's Tale*

Note: While these are the main texts for the course, some additional comics/readings will be made available electronically and at the Fogler Library's Reserve Desk

Grading:

Students are responsible for understanding the material presented in the lectures, in the texts, and in the discussions. All assignments must be submitted to receive a passing grade. The assignments and their values are as follows:

- Class Participation: 20%
- Discussion Paper #1: 20%
- Discussion Paper #2: 20%
- Midterm Exam (Oct 21): 15%
- Final Exam: 25%

Participation:

Student participation is required, even during classes scheduled as lectures, so attendance is strongly encouraged. The main opportunity for student participation will be during the discussion meetings at the end of the week. Most weeks, the discussion meetings will center around brief examples of present-day comics that reflect a particular week's theme. However, in weeks #6, #10, and #14, the discussion meetings will focus on one of the graphic novels listed as required texts (*Maus*, *Louis Riel*, and *Fun Home*). As a result, students will need to stretch out the reading of the graphic novels over the few weeks leading up to the scheduled discussions. The comics assigned in other weeks have been kept brief to reflect the fact that reading the graphic novels will take up much of a student's class prep time.

Discussion Papers:

As part of the course evaluation, students are required to write two 1,000 to 1,500-word (4-6 double-spaced pages, 12-point font) discussion papers. The papers will be based on the graphic novels *Maus*, *Louis Riel*, and *Fun Home*, and it is up to individual students to decide which two of the three graphic novels they wish to address. It is strongly suggested that students take notes as they read the graphic novels, both to facilitate better in-class discussions and to make the writing process easier. Once we have discussed a particular graphic novel, students then have one week to complete

their papers; that is, it is due at the beginning of the following discussion meeting, unless otherwise stated.

In the discussion papers, students will interpret, evaluate, and criticize the methods and content used by the comics creators to impart historical meaning and narrative; in other words, apply the intellectual tools developed during the first three weeks of the course. Ultimately, it will be up to you to determine which aspect or aspects of the graphical novel your paper will address. For example, you may wish to discuss a creator's depiction of certain characters, how it contributes to conveying historical meaning, and your assessment of its effectiveness. Stronger papers will include references to the text *The Power of Comics*. The papers must follow the conventions of formal essay writing and adhere to the *Chicago Manual of Style*; a useful citation guide is available here: www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html. There will be an in-class tutorial (Sept 16) on the fundamentals of writing a formal history essay.

Exams:

Both the midterm and final exams will consist of essay questions. The midterm exam will be given during scheduled class time (Oct 21), while the final exam will be held during the exam week at the end of the semester (TBD).

Late Assignments:

An assignment must be handed in at the beginning of the class on the date that the assignment is due. Assignments handed in after the due date, without prior arrangement, will be considered late. Late assignments will be penalized 5% per overdue day on the final grade of the assignment. Extensions to help students organize their work may be given without penalty if requested at least a week in advance. Extensions within a week of the due date will require presentation of a physician's note/medical certificate.

Absenteeism:

Absenteeism is strongly discouraged, as you cannot achieve a good class participation mark without being present. Please be advised that you are responsible for keeping abreast of all lectures, discussions, and disseminated information, including course changes and special announcements made in class. I may take steps to accommodate absence from class upon presentation of a physician's note/medical certificate.

Academic Honesty:

Academic honesty is very important. It is dishonest to cheat on exams, to copy term papers, to submit papers written by another person, to fake experimental results, or to copy or reword parts of books or articles into your own papers without appropriately citing the source. Students committing or aiding in any of these violations may be given failing grades for an assignment or for an entire course, at the discretion of the

instructor. In addition to any academic action taken by an instructor, these violations are also subject to action under the University of Maine Student Conduct Code. The maximum possible sanction under the student conduct code is dismissal from the University.

Students with Disabilities:

If you have a disability for which you may be requesting an accommodation, please contact Disabilities Services, 121 East Annex, 581-2319, as early as possible in the term.

Sexual Discrimination Reporting:

The University of Maine is committed to making campus a safe place for students. Because of this commitment, if you tell a teacher about an experience of **sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, relationship abuse (dating violence and domestic violence), sexual misconduct, or any form of gender discrimination** involving members of the campus, **your teacher is required to report** this information to the campus Office of Sexual Assault & Violence Prevention or the Office of Equal Opportunity.

If you want to talk in confidence to someone about an experience of sexual discrimination, please contact these resources:

- For *confidential resources on campus*: **Counseling Center: 207-581-1392** or **Cutler Health Center: at 207-581-4000**.
- For *confidential resources off campus*: **Rape Response Services: 1-800-310-0000** or **Spruce Run: 1-800-863-9909**.
- **Other resources:** The resources listed below can offer support but may have to report the incident to others who can help:
- For *support services on campus*: **Office of Sexual Assault & Violence Prevention: 207-581-1406**, **Office of Community Standards: 207-581-1409**, **University of Maine Police: 207-581-4040 or 911**. Or see the OSAVP website for a complete list of services at <http://www.umaine.edu/osavp/>.

Course Schedule:

Disruption Clause: In the event of an extended disruption of normal classroom activities, the format for this course may be modified to enable its completion within its programmed time frame. In that event, you will be provided an addendum to the syllabus that will supersede this version.

Course format: The first three weeks of the course will serve as an introduction to the field of comics studies (history, form, and culture), while the following twelve weeks will consist of acquainting students with some of the major topics and themes commonly encountered in the discipline of history.

With a three-class-per-week schedule, the first two classes of any particular week will be generally dedicated to lectures and the last class to a discussion meeting. When we enter the portion of the course focused on various topics and themes in history (weeks #4-15), the first class of the week will cover how inclusion of that week's topic or theme within the field of history has changed over time, that is, it will be a contextual lecture; the second class will be an examination of how that topic or theme has been dealt with in comics over time, that is, it will be an examination of comics as historical documents; and the third will be a discussion of how a particular topic or theme has been handled by present-day creators, that is, it will be a discussion of comics as a medium for historical analysis. The discussion meetings in weeks #6, #10, and #14 will center around the three graphic novels listed as required texts (*Maus*, *Louis Riel*, and *Fun Home*). Due to days scheduled with no classes, the course format will change somewhat in weeks #2, #7, #11, and #13, that is, it will be shortened and condensed.

It should be noted that the order of the topics and themes has been generally structured to lead up to the weeks in which we discuss the graphic novels, and to reflect changes in approaches in the discipline of history over time. Furthermore, a range of comics materials will be drawn upon throughout the course, from an assortment of genres, including superhero comics, other mainstream comics, underground comix, alternative comics, and government comics, and in various formats, including comic books, strips, graphic novels, and online comics. Most of the materials will be from North America, from the turn of the 20th century to the present, although there will be the occasional coverage of comics from other parts of the world. The general goal is to give students a broad-based sampling of how specific topics and themes have been dealt with over time.

Introduction to Comics Studies

Week #1: The History of Comics

Mon, Aug 29: Course Introduction and Review of Syllabus

Wed, Aug 31: Developing a Medium, 19th century-1960s

Fri, Sept 2: The Maturation of a Medium, 1960s-Present

Readings: *The Power of Comics*, Chapters 1-3

Week #2: The Form of Comics

Mon, Sept 5: Labor Day

Wed, Sept 7: Creating the Story

Fri, Sept 9: Experiencing the Story

Readings: *The Power of Comics*, Chapters 4 and 5

Week #3: The Culture of Comics

Mon, Sept 12: Exploring Meanings

Wed, Sept 14: Understanding Superheroes

Fri, Sept 16: Tutorial – Writing History Essays

Readings: *The Power of Comics*, Chapters 7 and 11

Topics and Themes in History

Week #4: Politics and Political Discourse

Mon, Sept 19: ...in the Historical Discipline

Wed, Sept 21: ...in the Comics Medium

Fri, Sept 23: Discussion Meeting #1

Week #5: Law and Order

Mon, Sept 26: ...in the Historical Discipline

Wed, Sept 28: ...in the Comics Medium

Fri, Sept 30: Discussion Meeting #2

Week #6: Armed Conflicts and Mass Atrocities

Mon, Oct 3: ...in the Historical Discipline

Wed, Oct 5: ...in the Comics Medium

Fri, Oct 7: Discussion Meeting #3 – *The Complete Maus: A Survivor's Tale*

Week #7: Science and Technology

Mon, Oct 10: Fall Break begins, no class

Wed, Oct 12: ...in the Historical Discipline

Fri, Oct 14: ...in the Comics Medium/Discussion Meeting #4

- *Maus* discussion paper due

Week #8: Nature and the Environment

Mon, Oct 17: ...in the Historical Discipline

Wed, Oct 19: ...in the Comics Medium/Discussion Meeting #5

Fri, Oct 21: Midterm Exam

Week #9: Race and Ethnicity

Mon, Oct 24: ...in the Historical Discipline

Wed, Oct 26: ...in the Comics Medium

Fri, Oct 30: Discussion Meeting #6

Week #10: Indigenous Peoples

Mon, Oct 31: ...in the Historical Discipline

Wed, Nov 2: ...in the Comics Medium

Fri, Nov 4: Discussion Meeting #7 – *Louis Riel: A Comic-Strip Biography*

Week #11: Civil Society

Mon, Nov 7: ...in the Historical Discipline

Wed, Nov 9: ...in the Comics Medium/Discussion Meeting #8

Fri, Nov 11: Veterans Day, no class

Week #12: Labor and the Working Class

Mon, Nov 14: ...in the Historical Discipline

- *Louis Riel* discussion paper due

Wed, Nov 16: ...in the Comics Medium

Fri, Nov 18: Discussion Meeting #9

Week #13: Gender

Mon, Nov 21: ...in the Historical Discipline

Wed, Nov 23: ...in the Comics Medium/Discussion Meeting #10

Thurs, Nov 24: Thanksgiving Break begins

Fri, Nov 25: No class

Week #14: The LGBTQ Community

Mon, Nov 28: ...in the Historical Discipline

Wed, Nov 30: ...in the Comics Medium

Fri, Dec 2: Discussion Meeting #11 – *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*

Week #15: The Future

Mon, Dec 5: ...in the Historical Discipline

Wed, Dec 7: ...in the Comics Medium

Fri, Dec 9: Discussion Meeting #12

- *Fun Home* discussion paper due

TBD: Final Exam