

HI2J9-15 Everyday People: Writing Nineteenth-Century British and American Lives

23/24

Department

History

Level

Undergraduate Level 2

Module leader

Lydia Plath

Credit value

15

Module duration

10 weeks

Assessment

100% coursework

Study location

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

The vast majority of people living in the past did not leave extensive archival papers, memoirs, or collections of letters, but instead appear in the historical record only fleetingly, and often without their consent. In recent years, the archival fragments of peoples' lives have been made increasingly available due to the growing genealogy industry, which has led to the mass digitisation of primary source databases including census rolls, newspapers, and medical and immigration records. This module asks: what can, and should, historians do with these readily available fragments of past lives? How do we tell their stories?

This module explores how historians can study the lives of people in the past using these online records, with particular focus on enslaved people, people of colour, women, and working class people living in nineteenth century Britain and the United States. It emphasises the ethical questions and methodological challenges posed by our access to these sources: just because they are available at the click of a button does not mean that we know the whole story, nor that that the people detailed on our screens would want us to tell it.

Module aims

This module takes as a founding principle that all people, regardless of status, lived lives worthy of historical study on their own terms, telling their own story, rather than as “case studies” or fragmentary evidence in larger social histories. The module encourages students to make use of cutting edge methodologies developed by Black feminist scholars, such as “critical fabulation” (Saidiya Hartman) and “reading along the bias grain” (Marisa Fuentes), to explore the archival evidence left by people in the nineteenth century US and Britain available through digitised records. Students will also engage with the ethical issues involved in the use of these records, as many people only appear in the digital archive without their consent, or as victims or (alleged) perpetrators of crimes. The module will guide students through a range of different types of digital sources, and students will be empowered to choose their own evidence to analyse and elucidate.

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

Students should be aware that this module may contain discussion of racial and sexual violence.

1. Introduction: Small Histories
2. “Search People”: Birth, Marriage, Death, and the Census
3. Newsworthy: Stories in Local Newspapers
4. Patients: Medical, Hospital, and Asylum Records
5. Criminals: The Proceedings of the Old Bailey
6. Reading Week
7. Enslaved and Free: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers’ Project
8. Self-Liberating People: Fugitives from American Slavery
9. Migrants: Passengers, Crew, and Convicts
10. Conclusions: Stories Composed from Objects

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Demonstrate a detailed knowledge of how historians can study the lives of people in the past, and the methodological and ethical challenges of doing so.
- Communicate ideas and findings about people in the past, adapting to a range of situations, audiences and degrees of complexity.
- Generate ideas through the analysis of a body of online primary source material.
- Analyse and evaluate the contributions made by existing interdisciplinary scholarship.
- Act with limited supervision and direction within defined guidelines, accepting responsibility for achieving deadlines.

Indicative reading list

John H. Arnold, "The Historian as Inquisitor: The Ethics of interrogating subaltern voices", *Rethinking History*, 2:3 (1998)

Arlette Farge, *The Allure of the Archives* (2013)

Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence and the Archive* (2016)

Francoise N. Hamlin, "Historians and Ethics: Finding Anne Moody", *American Historical Review* (2020)

Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts", *Small Axe* 26 (2008)

Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (2007)

Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (2019)

Julia Laite, "The Emmet's Inch: Small History in a Digital Age", *Journal of Social History* 53:4 (2020)

Julia Laite, *The Disappearance of Lydia Harvey: A True Story of Sex, Crime and the Meaning of Justice* (2021)

Jill Lepore, "Historians Who Love Too Much: Reflections on Microhistory and Biography", *The Journal of American History*, 88:1 (2001)

Alison Light, *Common People* (2014)

Tiya Miles, *All that She Carried: The Journey of Ashley's Sack, a Black Family Keepsake* (2021)

Julie Myerson, *Home: The Story of Everyone Who Ever Lived in Our House* (2004)

Hans Renders and Haan, Binne De, *Theoretical Discussions of Biography: Approaches from History, Microhistory, and Life Writing* (Brill, 2014)

Hallie Rubenhold, *The Five: The Untold Lives of the Women Killed by Jack the Ripper* (2019)

Carolyn Steedman, "On Not Writing Biography", *New Formations* 67 (2009)

Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (2002)

Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman* (1986)

Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Well-Behaved Women Seldom Make History* (2007)

Emily West, "Reflections on the History and Historians of the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves: Enslaved Women and Intimate Partner Sexual Violence", *American Nineteenth Century History* 19:1 (2008)

Natalie Zemon Davis, *Women on the Margins: Three Seventeenth-Century Lives* (1997)

Subject specific skills

see learning outcomes

Transferable skills

see learning outcomes

Study

Study time

Type	Required	Optional
Seminars	9 sessions of 1 hour (6%)	
Tutorials	(0%)	2 sessions of 30 minutes
Practical classes	9 sessions of 1 hour (6%)	
Private study	132 hours (88%)	
Total	150 hours	

Private study description

History modules require students to undertake extensive independent research and reading to prepare for seminars and assessments. As a rough guide, students will be expected to read and prepare to comment on three substantial texts (articles or book chapters) for each seminar taking approximately 3 hours. Each assessment requires independent research, reading around 6-10 texts and writing and presenting the outcomes of this preparation in an essay, review, presentation or other related task.

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You do not need to pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Assessment group A

Assessment component	Weighting	Study time	Eligible for self-certification
1500 word essay	30%		Yes (extension)
Reassessment component is the same			

Assessment component			
3000 word essay	50%		Yes (extension)
Reassessment component is the same			

	Weighting	Study time	Eligible for self-certification
Assessment component			
Seminar Contribution	10%		No
Reassessment component			
1000 word reflective essay in lieu of seminar contribution			Yes (extension)
Assessment component			
Student-Led Seminar	10%		No
Reassessment component			
1000 word reflective essay in lieu of student-led seminar			Yes (extension)

Feedback on assessment

Written feedback via online system and tutorials

Availability

Courses

This module is Optional for:

- Year 2 of UENA-VQ32 Undergraduate English and History
- Year 2 of UHIA-V102 Undergraduate History (Renaissance and Modern History Stream)
- Year 2 of UHIA-V1V5 Undergraduate History and Philosophy
- Year 2 of UHIA-VM11 Undergraduate History and Politics
- Year 2 of UHIA-VM13 Undergraduate History and Politics (with a term in Venice)
- Year 2 of UHIA-VL13 Undergraduate History and Sociology
- Year 2 of UHIA-VL15 Undergraduate History and Sociology (with a term in Venice)

This module is Option list A for:

- Year 2 of UHIA-V1V7 Undergraduate History and Philosophy (with a term in Venice)

This module is Option list B for:

- Year 2 of UHIA-V100 Undergraduate History

This module is Option list C for:

- Year 2 of UHIA-V100 Undergraduate History
- Year 2 of UHIA-V102 Undergraduate History (Renaissance and Modern History Stream)