

Crazy Rich Europeans: Wealth & Inequality in Modern History

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HIST 113B

Crazy Rich Europeans brings together insights from modern European and Asian history, business, economics, and sociology. We will investigate the changing role, power, and composition of social elites in history and how they impacted workers, colonial populations, women, and urban landscapes in the past two centuries. We will study how actors as diverse as fashion models, Russian oligarchs, and powerful bankers gain their status and influence. We will also discuss the origins of global social inequality, including the 'great divergence' debate on Chinese and European modernization. How do we get from 'Crazy Rich Europeans' to 'Crazy Rich Asians'?

Grading:

Book Review: 20%

Research paper: 45%

Participation: 20% [regular attendance: 7 percent; presentation: 7 percent, active presence: 6 percent]

Midterm: 15%

Requirements:

Papers

Your main learning outcome at this seminar will be to write an original **research paper** based on the analysis of primary sources: newspapers, online and offline archives, or printed materials related to themes of our course. Topics on Asian histories of capitalism/the wealthy are welcome, as well as papers that investigate current affairs. The length of this essay should be about 8 to 12 double-spaced pages or 2,000 words (Times New Roman, Font 12, double-spaced; no bibliography needed; Chicago Citation Style required).

In addition, you are required to write a short, 700 - 1,000-word (three double-spaced pages) **book review** due Week Seven, on **March 5** in class. Ideally, your book review is based on your presentation and it is recommended that you connect the choice of the book to the theme of your research paper as well. You may pick a book of your own choice yet you are encouraged to consult the instructor to make sure it's a good fit for our course.

Attendance

Seminars of this kind benefit from **active participation and regular attendance**. You may lose up to one-third of your participation grade or 7 percent of your total grade if you miss more than two seminars without an MC or VR's note. Yet **you may miss one seminar without notice** and penalty (except the time when you are giving a presentation).

Presentation

You will have to prepare a brief **presentation** once during the semester and **guide follow-up discussions**. Presentations should connect to the assigned readings and (1) draw on the main arguments of a specific book (2) situate it within historiography (3) single out themes and passages you have found esp. interesting. You are not required to read the entire monograph, but do read chapters and book reviews that allows you to have an overview of the book's argument. In addition, prepare questions related to readings that week.

Midterm

There will be a midterm exam around week 9 that tests your knowledge of key readings.

Course structure

This discussion-based research seminar includes brief lectures and presentations by the instructor yet is ultimately based on group work, pair work, student presentations, and student debates grounded in scholarship. It is also a reading-heavy course, with 50-100 pages of literature, including primary and secondary sources assigned for each seminar. Readings are tested through the midterm exam, and regular preparation is rewarded through the participation grade.

The overall weight of the midterm is small (15%), as I would like to emphasize that the main contribution of students will be to form their own arguments based on primary and secondary sources in the book review and research projects (65%).

Regarding its contributions to the Brandeis curriculum, it complements existing offerings by speaking to the history of modern Europe and the history of capitalism.

Learning goals

Students will learn to think critically about economic life and will be able to situate institutions and practices, such as the stock market, credit, and debt in their historical contexts. We will also study the economic and social contexts of colonization, slavery, and gender inequality.

Participants of this course will acquire the knowledge to analyze primary sources (memoirs, archival sources, literature, film) and bring them into conversation with secondary literature. Assignments will teach students to work individually on longer research projects and also enhance the skills of group and teamwork. Students will also learn how to communicate their findings succinctly through brief presentations. Finally, as an interdisciplinary course anchored in history, readings will draw on a variety of fields such as economics, politics, literature and anthropology.