

## QUEENS COLLEGE – DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY COLLOQUIUM – FALL 2019

392W (01) 48807      VIOLENCE IN MEDIEVAL EUROPE  
Professor T. Billado      Thursdays 1:40-4:30pm

The online Urban Dictionary defines “get medieval” as: “To physically torture or injure someone by means of archaic methods, usually involving tools frequently used for blacksmithing or traditional feudal era torture.” This definition, of course, derives from the famous scene in Quentin Tarantino’s *Pulp Fiction*, in which the character Marsellus Wallace threatens, “I’m a get medieval on your ass!” This popular conception of the medieval period as a particularly brutal and violent one is supported not only by movies like *Pulp Fiction* or *Braveheart* (which the MPAA rated R, “for brutal medieval warfare”), but also by the writings of European historians. In their scholarship, the Middle Ages have long been known as the most violent period in European history. Most of these writers, however, have ignored theoretical questions about violence. As medievalist William Ian Miller argues, “We are used to thinking about violence as a problem, yet we only rarely think of it as a problematic analytical category.” This course will explore such theoretical questions about violence, including: What, exactly, is violence? Are certain acts violent? Or only when performed by certain actors? Can non-physical acts, for example speech-acts, be termed “violent”? Can we compare violence within and across societies? Is “violence” even a useful category of historical analysis? In order to answer these questions, we will read and analyze a selection of medieval primary sources (including epics, law codes, sagas, chronicles, poetry, and saints’ lives) alongside theoretical works on violence, and recent historiography on homicide, feuding and vengeance, lordship, serfdom, ceremonial executions, ordeals, torture, cursing, crusading, and tax collection.

392W (04) 48811      A PIVOTAL DECADE: THE 1970s AND AMERICA  
Professor P. Vellon      Tuesdays 1:40-4:30pm

The 1970s is often perceived as the forgotten decade between the “transformative” and “radical” 1960s and the Reagan “revolution” that ushered in “morning in America” in the 1980s. However, the 1970s was much more than a ten-year interval connecting two critical decades. By examining the impact of profound shifts in economic, political, and cultural power, this course will explore the far-reaching impact of the 1970s. Some of the many themes explored will include: the economic impact of an emerging post-industrial society; the rise of the Sunbelt; urban “decay;” the feminist movement; civil rights; the rise of ethnic identity; political corruption and realignment; environmentalism; religious fundamentalism; cultural production, and more. We will place these themes within a broader historical context and strive to illustrate how many of these themes are interrelated. Further, we’ll examine the impact of these changes and their continued influence on American society today.

392W (02) 48809      AMERICA IN THE 1960s  
Professor C. Giardina      Wednesdays 3:10-6:00pm

How did the socially conscious, uproarious, irreverent “Sixties” evolve from the quietism of the 1950s? What has been the impact of this period of deep and rapid change? From the signature social movements to landmark legislation, from the counterculture to the political murders and assassination of leader after leader, the course will explore the highs and lows of this tumultuous decade. The course will include the role of Queens College activists on campus and nationally.

392W (03) 48810      ALEXANDER THE GREAT  
Professor M. McDonnell      Tuesdays 4:30-7:20pm

Purpose and Scope: In 334 BC, at the age of an American college senior, Alexander, king of Macedonia and the ruler of Greece, fulfilled the dream of his father Philip by crossing into Asia Minor and beginning his conquest of the Persian Empire. Over the next eleven years Alexander defeated the armies of the Persian king in a series of brilliant battles and lightning-fast campaigns; and then led his troops deep into central Asia and beyond to India. His conquests opened the east to a massive Greek immigration that transformed the area, making Greek the official language west of the Euphrates until the Arab Conquest. But Alexander also left the Persian Empire, which had given prosperity and relative peace to a vast area for 200 years, in ruins, and his death in Babylon in 323 was followed by twenty more years of war and destruction. Alexander was the most written about, and arguably the most influential individual of Greco-Roman history. His career was controversial from the beginning. Because Alexander’s career is impossible without the achievements of his father, it is necessary to examine how Philip II transformed the kingdom of Macedon from a backward and marginal power in the Greek world, into Greece’s master.

The first part of the course will be devoted to an examination of Macedonia and Philip’s career. Then it will turn to Alexander and his place in history. Why did he invade Persia? Was he satisfying a personal ambition, or a general ambition of the Greeks? What problems did he encounter in his campaigns? What were his solutions to these problems? What was his attitude towards non-Greeks? The course will also address problems in historical analysis and argumentation. How do we know what we know about Philip and Alexander and the world they left behind? Although he was the most written about person in classical antiquity, no contemporary account of Alexander’s career survives. How much can we really know about Alexander from an author who lived more than four hundred years after his death? Historical problems almost always return to questions about how sources should be used. The papers, examinations, and discussions in this course are designed to have students consider not only the deeds and character of Alexander, but also the sources on which any conclusions must rest.