**HISTORY 89.002 (Spring 2020)**

**WATCHING TV TO UNDERSTAND HISTORY**

**[Note: This is a draft of the syllabus (November 27, 2020). There could be slight changes. If you have questions about the class, please feel free to contact me by email.]**

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Office Hours: T 3:30-5:00 (<https://unc.zoom.us/j/92897074553>) and by appointment

Course Time: TTh 2:00-3:15 (<https://unc.zoom.us/j/91799737520>)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The television series is a media form on which Americans and Europeans are increasingly dependent for their entertainment and education. Since 1945 and particularly since the early 1970s, the French have fought in the academy and in a diversity of sites in the public sphere over how to tell the history of the occupation and liberation of France during World War II. Can a television series present to the viewing public the complexities of this history as it is understood by historians? To address this question, students will analyze *A French Village*, a series with ambitious aesthetic goals—it was the first television series in France written following models derived from successful American series.

If asked what you know about the society in which *Homeland* is set or the Baltimore of *The Wire*, you know only what you have seen in the film. Keep this in mind as you watch *A French Village*. If this were your source of knowledge on the occupation and liberation of France during World War II, what would you learn about how the French and Germans thought about and lived these events? Examine the aesthetic decisions made by the scriptwriters and director to convey these sentiments to the audience. Reflect on how the series makes you feel about the individuals you see and in turn on the history they are making and experiencing.

The scriptwriter Frédéric Krivine and his production team took up this challenge. An admirer of American series like *The Wire* and *Breaking Bad*, he and his team wrote a pioneering series on a fictional small city of Villeneuve in central France between 1940 and 1945. It follows the lives and the moral and political complexities of French inhabitants of Villeneuve and of their relations with the German army and Gestapo stationed in the city. In 72 episodes of 50 minutes each broadcase from 2009 to 2017, Krivine took a large, faithful viewing audience through the occupation and liberation. Two episodes were broadcast back-to-back each week in France. The series is designed for binge-watching.

Krivine weaves the major issues and narrative lines in *A French Village* in such a way that viewers engage with them at several points in each group of episodes. He devotes particular attention to what the leading historian of the Occupation and adviser to the series Jean-Pierre Azéma, borrowing the phrase from Primo Levi, refers to as the “gray zone” constituted by the French consciously or unconsciously making decisions about identity and survival throughout the war. Until the early 1970s, the French saw themselves as having been a “people in resistance” in occupied France. However, at that point, the first postwar generation came to see occupied France as a nation of collaborators, deeply complicit in the deportation of Jews. While historians have developed a more complex understanding of the lived experience of the French in occupied France, the French as a whole have clung to a categorization of the population as collaborators, resisters and fence-sitters. In *A French Village*, Krivine has taken the gamble of presenting the often very troubling ambiguities of people living in difficult times. In this, he goes well beyond pursuing the “reality effect” (Roland Barthes) in an historically situated drama. Krivine’s work has been very well received by historians of the period. Viewing, discussing and writing about *A French Village* with these issues in mind will develop students’ abilities as historians and as analysts of the possibilities and limitations of different aesthetic forms.

COURSE TEXTS

Students will need access **to all seven seasons** of *A French Village*. These are available (with subtitles) through Amazon Prime MHz Choice ($7.99/month). Students will need to sign up for Amazon Prime and subscribe to MHz Choice for four or five months. Individual seasons are available elsewhere, but you will need to see all seven seasons.

In addition, students will read all of Chris Millington, *France in the Second World War* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2020). The library has not yet acquired a copy. It is available from UNC Student Stores and from on-line booksellers. An e-book version is less expensive and equally good for this course.

COURSE FORMAT

Class will begin or end with a presentation by the instructor of ways to analyze the television series as an aesthetic object and/or a presentation by the instructor of elements of the historical narrative and historiographic debates referenced in the series. Each class meeting will be devoted to discussion as a class or in breakout groups of a chapter from Millington, *France in the Second World War* and/or the episodes viewed for that day. Come with your responses, concerns, critiques. Keeping a viewing notebook is intended to help you go beyond expressions of like or dislike of the “It’s got a good beat and you can dance to it” genre.

Remember that you are watching this series to learn about people in a specific historical situation, but just as you (yes, you) are thankfully not 100% explicable by your historical situation, neither are the characters in this series or people who lived in the past. What makes us interesting, what makes us human, is likely not what is explained solely with reference to a particular historical situation.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

**Written Work** (70%). There are two types of written work: a viewing notebook (30%) and a ten-page paper (40%). Late notebook or paper submissions will be marked down one grade for each day or portion of the day that they are late, beginning at the assigned time of submission the day it is due.

**Viewing Notebook**. Each student will keep a viewing notebook that I can read. Maintain your viewing notebook in a Microsoft Word file on your computer. Write a one-page double-spaced reflection on your viewing each week. By 11 a.m. on Thursday from January 21 to April 15 (except March 11), upload your cumulative file on the Sakai Assignments page. By this point, you should have viewed all the episodes for Tuesday and Thursday of this week. Do not present plot summaries. (The point is not to show me you have watched the assigned episodes. Of cours you have!) Enter the world of occupied France in all its complexities. What particular choices were made to present them in the episodes being analyzed. Feel free to criticize the scriptwriters and filmmakers if this is what you think. When you do this, recognize what they were attempting to do and why you think they were not successful in historical and/or aesthetic terms. I will read a portion of these notebooks each week and will grade the notebooks of all students four times during the semester. Since you do not know which week I will examine yours, stay up to date. Your three best of the four grades will account for 30% of your semester grade.

**Ten-page Paper**. Select a major character, a particular group (i.e. women, Germans, Americans, Jews, or Communists), an occupation (i.e. education, medicine, police, etc.), activity (economy, sexuality, etc. or a political phenomenon particular to the Occupation (i.e. collaboration or resistance) and analyze how your subject is presented in *A French Village*, in light of contemporary historical research (drawing primarily from Millington, *France in the Second World War*) using character development, analysis of individual scenes and narratives from the totality of the series as evidence. If you choose a character, address the character as an individual worthy of analysis in his or her own right, not simply or even primarily as a manifestation of a political or demographic identity. No character exists outside of relations with other characters. Marcel, Gustave, Suzanne, Jeannette, Rita, Ezechiel Cohn, etc. are complex individuals and the point of a dramatic series is to explore this complexity. In turn, if you choose a group or a political phenomenon, explore the ambiguous and contradictory ways these groups or phenomenon are presented in the characters seen to embody them in the series. Tell me in your Viewing Notebook entry **by March 4**, what your topic is. Feel free to pursue ideas you have before then. As you view episodes, take notes (beyond what you include in the Viewing Notebook I read) that you can use in your paper. However, you can also use your Viewing Notebook entries to explore ideas you are developing about your research subject.

**Discussion** (30%). Discussions are the work of engaged participants who develop questions and arguments in dialogue with others. The point is not for a student to say something and then retire to his or her shell, waiting for the bell to ring. The important element is the quality, not the quantity of a student’s contributions. We will work with a diversity of discussion formats to assure all can contribute in ways that are comfortable for them.[[1]](#footnote-1) What I would like to see is that you remain clearly engaged and intervene regularly over the course of the semester in such a way as to help other students and me see issues in new ways (and can defend why these new ways are valid and important). Respond to one another, not solely to me. Recognizing others whether by agreeing or disagreeing with them or building off of what they say is the heart of a strong discussion. If you prepare well for sections, but do not feel comfortable intervening in discussion, see me at the beginning of the semester and we can develop strategies for you to enter the discussion. Exams and papers are important elements of a university education, but in the workplace and in the public sphere of citizens’ debate, your abilities to make and defend an argument orally will probably be more important. At each assessment of your viewing notebook, I will comment on your participation in discussion as well.

**Grading Scale**: I will use the Sakai scale: A=95; A-=90; B+= 87; B= 83; B-= 80, C+= 77; C= 73, C-= 70….

POLICIES

**Attendance**: No right or privilege exists that permits a student to be absent from any class meetings, except for these University Approved Absences[[2]](#footnote-2): 1. Authorized University activities; 2. Disability/religious observance/pregnancy, as required by law and approved by [Accessibility Resources and Service](https://ars.unc.edu/) and/or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office](https://eoc.unc.edu/what-we-do/accommodations/) (EOC); or 3. Significant health condition and/or personal/family emergency as approved by the [Office of the Dean of Students](https://odos.unc.edu/), [Gender Violence Service Coordinators,](https://womenscenter.unc.edu/resources/gender-violence-services/) and/or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office](https://eoc.unc.edu/what-we-do/accommodations/) (EOC). Students are responsible for completing any reading/work due during their absence. If you know in advance that you are going to miss class or have a legitimate excuse for missing class, please discuss the matter with me.

**Emails:** Students are responsible for knowing within one day about any course announcements sent by email during the course of the semester. (Check your emails each day.) I in turn will make every effort to respond to emails from students in a timely manner. Last minute emails about assignments, however, might or might not be answered in time to provide critical feedback (please email well before any deadlines).

**Honor Code:**  Students are expected to be familiar with and observe the Honor Code: <http://catalog.unc.edu/policies-procedures/honor-code/> .[[3]](#footnote-3) Be particularly aware of plagiarism. You do not need to do research to ace this course. Your time will be much better spent reviewing and rethinking material in *A French Village* than visiting wiki sites. However, should you venture off the preserve, be very careful not to import text from elsewhere into your work unless you give a full citation.[[4]](#footnote-4) In particular, be aware of importing text from elsewhere and reworking it into “your own words,” without attribution. This too is plagiarism. Plagiarism will be detected—it’s not hard—and will be sanctioned, by a ‘0’ (not an ‘F’) on the paper or the viewing notebook the first time if it is just a question of a few sentences and by being brought before the Honor Court if the first violation is more serious than a few sentences or in the case of a second offense.

**Human Rights**: The University’s [Policy on Prohibited Harassment, Discrimination and Related Misconduct](http://sexualassaultanddiscriminationpolicy.unc.edu/) prohibits discrimination or harassment on the basis of an individual’s race, color, national original, age, religion, creed, disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, gender expression, genetic information, or veteran’s status. Related misconduct includes sexual violence, sexual exploitation, interpersonal (relationship) violence, and stalking.[[5]](#footnote-5)

**Accessibility Resources:** UNC-Chapel Hill facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations for students with learning disabilities, physical disabilities, mental health struggles, chronic medical conditions, temporary disability, or pregnancy complications, all of which can impair student success. See the ARS website for contact and registration information: <https://ars.unc.edu/about-ars/contact-us>

**Counseling and Psychological Services:** CAPS is strongly committed to addressing the mental health needs of a diverse student body through timely access to consultation and connection to clinically appropriate services, whether for short or long-term needs. Go to their website: <https://caps.unc.edu/> or visit their facilities on the third floor of the Campus Health Services building for a walk-in evaluation to learn more.

**This syllabus is subject to change at the professor’s discretion.**

. Schedule

1/19 Introduction to the Course; Historical Context: The French Nation-State, The Legacy of World War I, Immigration, The Popular Front, the Spanish Civil War, Nazi-Soviet Pact, the Defeat in 1940, French Prisoners of War, and the Line of Demarcation (Villeneuve and Essarts)

I will present the goals of the course and discuss the television series as an aesthetic form. Familiarize yourself with “the basics of how to read a film” in the Resources page. In the ‘Resources’ page of the Sakai site, there is also a list of the characters. Learn their names. This will help you discuss and write about the series.

During this first week or two of class, I will also meet individually with each of you to get to know you.

1/21 Discussion

Read: Chris Millington, *France in the Second World War*, chap. 1 AND

View: Season 1, episodes 1-2 of *A French Village*

1/26 Discussion

Read: Chris Millington, *France in the Second World War*, chap. 2 AND

View: Season 1, episodes 3-4 of *A French Village*

1/28 Discussion

View: Season 1, episodes 5-6 of *A French Village*

2/2 Discussion

Read: Chris Millington, *France in the Second World War*, chap. 3 AND

View: Season 1, episodes 7-8 of *A French Village*

2/4 Discussion

View: Season 1, episodes 9-12 of *A French Village*

2/9 Discussion

Read: Chris Millington, *France in the Second World War*, chap. 4 AND

View: Season 2, episodes 1-2 of *A French Village*

2/11 Discussion

View: Season 2, episodes 3-4 of *A French Village*

2/18  Discussion

Read: Chris Millington, *France in the Second World War*, chap. 5 AND

View: Season 2, episodes 5-6 of *A French Village*

2/23 Discussion

Read: Chris Millington, *France in the Second World War*, chap. 6 AND

View: Season 2, episodes 7-8 of *A French Village*

2/25 Discussion

View: Season 2, episodes 9-10 of *A French Village*

3/2 Discussion

Read: Chris Millington, *France in the Second World War*, chaps. 7-8 AND

View: Season 2, episodes 11-12 of *A French Village*

3/4 Discussion

View: Season 3, episodes 1-2 of *A French Village*

By March 4 (but earlier is better), identify the subject of your paper in your Viewing Notebook.

3/9 Discussion

View: Season 3, episodes 3-6 of *A French Village*

3/16 Discussion

View: Season 3, episodes 7-12 of *A French Village*

3/18 Discussion

View: Season 4, episodes 1-4 of *A French Village*

3/23 Discussion

View: Season 4, episodes 5-8 of *A French Village*

3/25 Discussion

View: Season 4, episodes 9-12 of *A French Village*

3/30 Discussion

View: Season 5, episodes 1-4 of *A French Village*

4/1 Discussion

View: Season 5, episodes 5-8 of *A French Village*

4/6 Discussion

View: Season 5, episodes 9-12 of *A French Village*

4/8 Discussion

View: Season 6, episodes 1-4 of *A French Village*

4/13 Discussion

View: Season 6, episodes 5-6 and Season 7, episodes 1-2 of *A French Village*

4/15 Discussion

View: Season 7, episodes 3-6 of *A French Village*

4/20 Paper Preparation

You will have these two weeks to work on your paper. In this and the classes that follow you will discuss your ideas with other students in breakout rooms and present them to the class. You will also meet with the instructor outside of class.

4/22 Paper Preparation

Post on the Assignment page the argument of your paper or a draft of your paper **by the time class starts on April 22**, I will get back to you with comments by April 27.

4/27 Paper Preparation

4/29 Paper Preparation

5/4 What Have We Learned?

**Papers are due on the Assignments page by the beginning of class**. The class will discuss what we have learned about history and the presentation of the past from our sojourn in Villeneuve .

Brian de Palma is planning a series based on *A French Village* set in a town in Kentucky in 1861, entitled *Newton 1861*. He is working with Frédéric Krivine on developing the series. Think about what you think should be in it.

1. Students will not limit their role to being viewers. Historians are trained to make their arguments with evidence, but not to present seemingly extraneous details like those that make individuals human, a necessity in a television series. I encourage you to put yourselves in the role of showrunners. How do they construct a narrative that conveys understandings of history without seeming to do so, and that audiences without the intention of learning about the past, will embrace? We will run some classes as working groups called to review episodes in which selected students act as writers and as directors. In a limited amount of screen time, what are the goals in terms of history and story and of emotional impact, and how well are they realized? [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Office of the Dean of Students ([dos@unc.edu](mailto:dos@unc.edu)) handles University Approved Absences. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See <http://studentconduct.unc.edu/students/honor-system-module> for an explanation of the code. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. For an online source, give the complete address and the day you consulted it. Ideally you should provide the name of the website, the title or if not the title, a descriptive phrase identifying the piece cited, and the author. If there is no author of this particular document, the name of the website will do. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Any student who is impacted by discrimination, harassment, interpersonal (relationship) violence, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, or stalking is encouraged to seek resources on campus or in the community. Please contact the [**Director of Title IX Compliance**](mailto:adrienne.allison@unc.edu)**,** [**Report and Response Coordinators**](mailto:reportandresponse@unc.edu)**,** [**Counseling & Psychological Services**](https://caps.unc.edu/) (confidential), or the [**Gender Violence Services Coordinators**](mailto:gvsc@unc.edu)(confidential) to discuss your specific needs. Additional resources are available at [**safe.unc.edu.**](http://safe.unc.edu/) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)