COURSE DESCRIPTION: In recent years historians have developed a new technique called microhistory for capturing the lives of the people who have been lost to history—peasants, heretics, poor women, gays, and con-conformists of all sorts. These were the people who because of their low social status, rural origins, illiteracy, or unpopular beliefs were ignored, despised, or persecuted by the dominant society. Microhistory is a method of investigation that usually relies on the evidence from judicial trials of otherwise obscure people who found themselves in trouble with the authorities. The method gives a voice to those who otherwise left no written record of their lives. The result of the studies has been a remarkable re-evaluation of the experiences and beliefs of the common people of pre-modern Europe.

AREA OF CONCENTRATION: Europe, America, Asia

TEACHING METHOD: Discussion, role playing, mock debates

EVALUATION METHOD: Oral presentations, participation in discussions, 2 short papers and a final paper on your own microhistory. No exams.

GRADING BASIS: ANC (no P/N option)

TENTATIVE READING LIST:
Carlo Ginzburg, “Clues,” on Canvas.
Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero, eds., Microhistory and the Lost Peoples of Europe, 9780801841835.
Natalie Zemon Davis, The Return of Martin Guerre, 9780674766914.
Jonathan D. Spence, The Death of Woman Wang, 9780140051216.
Laura Thatcher Ulrich, A Midwife’s Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, based on her Diary, 1785-1812, 9780679733768.
Simon Schama, Dead Certainties, 978067979736134.
Richard White, Remembering Ahanagran, 9780295983554.

INSTRUCTOR PROFILE: Edward Muir grew up in the foothills of the Wasatch Mountains in Utah, close-by the Emigration Trail along which wagon trains of Mormon pioneers and California-bound settlers made their way westward. As a child he loved to explore the broken-down wagons and abandoned household goods left at the side of the trail and from that acquired a fascination with the past. Besides the material remains of the past he grew up with stories of his Mormon pioneer ancestors and an appreciation for how the past continued to influence the present. From a teenage fascination with music and opera he became interested in Italy and during his undergraduate years lived and studied in Florence during the year after the devastating floods. Later as a graduate student he worked in a team to re-identify flood-damaged Renaissance manuscripts in the Uffizi archives. Besides his frequent travels to Italy, his twin passions are skiing in the Rocky Mountains and rooting for the Chicago Cubs, who managed last year to prove that the impossible can happen.