

Historiographical Essay Assignment

History 4411

Dr. Holdzkom

“All history is present history in the sense that the concerns of the present are bound somehow to affect the way history is studied and written. All history is also personal, since it is impossible to avoid the influence of one's own opinions and prejudices on the selection and emphasis of one's historical material.”

— Paul Cartledge

Historiography is a very important part of what we historians do. In order for us to approach a historical problem, we need to know how historians, past and present, have approached it. We also need to be aware—as the beginning of the above quote tells us—that the present affects the way we study and write history. There is no such thing as an objective historian! We all have our baggage and biases that affect what we do.

For this assignment, you will take a historical event/person/problem **WITHIN THE PERAMITERS OF THIS CLASS** (1763-1789, events in what will become the U.S.) and write a historiographical essay on the event/person/problem. Your essay will be a comparison of **two (or more) specific historians** who have differing perspectives on your topic or who have come to similar conclusions in different ways. You will chose your topic in consultation with me. In your essay, you will need to ask and answer—to the best of your ability—the following questions:

- Why has this event, person, problem come to the attention of historians?
- What are the fundamental questions that your historians have asked about the event, person, problem?
- What biases do you see in the writing of your historians? Is there a clear agenda present in the writing?
- What conclusions have these historians come to about the event/person/problem?
- Are the conclusions drawn by the historians flawed in any way? [In this instant, the historians will be a big help to you, for they will have pointed

- out the flaws of their colleagues' work, past and present!] Your job is to look as objectively as possible at each conclusion and comment on its validity.
- Finally, you need to ask about the state of the field of study on this issue. Where are the gaps? What further focus could historians take to understand "what happened?" Have your historians missed something in their debate?

SOURCES:

Your essay should use at least **FIVE scholarly sources!!** These sources would include the work of your historians as well as works that provide context for the topic we have chosen together. You should also account for the context in which your historians are writing. Scholarly sources include books and journal articles. You will need to focus your attention on the major books/articles written by your historians about your topic. **INTERNET SOURCES ARE ACCEPTABLE ONLY IF THEY ARE ELECTRONIC COPIES OF ORIGINAL WORKS!** In this particular case, Wikipedia is not an acceptable source. It is a starting place only.

Length and citation style

Your essay should be 8-10 pages long (12-point font, double-spaced, typed) and should use the Turabian style of Citation.

http://www.press.uchicago.edu/books/turabian/turabian_citationguide.html

Due dates

You must choose your topic by **Thursday, February 9th**. Please do this through your KSU e-mail account OR in writing some other way. Failure to meet this deadline will result in a 5-point reduction on the final paper. Please feel free to choose a topic LONG before this deadline. The more time you have to work on this, the better.

You may submit a rough draft to me by **Thursday, March 23rd**. **This is optional! You may e-mail rough drafts to me by this date.**

Your final paper is due on **Thursday, April 13th**. **No exceptions! I will not accept late papers!!**

You will submit your paper to the Assignments feature in D2L.