

BF 114, Creating American History
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Monday, 2-5

In this course we will be reading a number of books in American history. We will be trying to understand how the authors have shaped our understanding of what American history is; we will also be trying to understand what assumptions have gone into the works of the authors themselves.

Each of you, each week, should write a two-page (600 word) paper on the week's reading. It will be due before the class meeting and won't be accepted thereafter. (Those of you who miss the paper or the class may make up the work by writing a similar paper on another non-assigned text, but I don't recommend this as a strategy).

With the below list of assignments I've also included a list of questions that might help you clarify your papers and ideas, but you need not treat the questions as gospel, and if you have ideas of your own, you may ignore the questions entirely. You should, however, focus your essay on a well-defined topic and have a convincing thesis that you briefly explicate, defend, or rebut.

DO NOT write a "response paper." We will get your responses in the more informal class discussion. The papers should be designed as coherent exercises on a clearly defined topic. You do not need to footnote, or to use sources outside the readings. You do need to write cogently in complete, intelligible sentences in papers that formulate a reasoned argument.

Attached to this syllabus is a short set of principles on how to write expository papers. **READ IT CAREFULLY.** You will do fine if you follow the guidelines.

Your paper should be double-spaced with a separate cover page stapled on the front. This cover page should be the only one containing your name.

Familiarize yourself with the code of academic integrity at Penn. If I catch you cheating, I will do everything in my power to have you suspended. This will be very unpleasant for you.

All books are on sale at the Penn Book Center, on 34th St., above Walnut. All materials are on reserve at Rosengarten, and there is one reading for sale as a bulk pack at Campus Copy, 3937 Walnut St.

Grades will depend on the papers and on intelligent and informed class discussion.

INTRODUCTION, Monday, January 26,

Reading 1, February 2, Kai Erikson, Wayward Puritans

Edmund Morgan, whom you will be reading next week, criticized this book because, he said, its orientation was the present and not the Puritans. What could he mean by this? Is the criticism justified? We will be reading several books, like Erikson, that bring to bear social science ideas on history. What do you make of this perspective?

Reading 2, February 9, Edmund Morgan, The Puritan Dilemma

What does Morgan think the Puritan dilemma is? Who writes more convincingly about the anti-nomian crisis, Morgan or Erikson? How does Morgan define extremism and moderation? Do you think *Morgan's* orientation is the present and not the Puritans? Is there a difference between history and biography? Or between plain old history and social science history?

Reading 3, February 16, Howard Fast, Citizen Tom Paine

What is to be said for assigning fiction in history courses? What is to be said for assigning *historical* fiction? Would it change your ideas about the value of this novel were you to learn that its author was a communist? How is Paine like or unlike Bradford? How is biography like or unlike Morgan's? What is the function of leadership in American society? Is it legitimate to build American history around the lives of great men?

Reading 4, February 23, The Essential Federalist and Anti Federalist Papers, ed. David Wootton. Read of the anti federalists: Smith of June 21; Cato 4; and Brutus 6 and 12. Read of the Federalists, 1, 6, 9, 10, 14, 15, 23, 37, 39, 47, 48, 49, 51, 62, 63, 70, 78, 84, 85. (You may read others if something else interests you. The main thing is to see what the authors are getting at and to read what you do read carefully).

What do these guys think of human nature? Is there a difference between the two groups? What is the best way to organize a government? What is a republican government? What is a federal sort of government? What are checks and balances and the separation of powers? How do you prevent oppression? Do you see any conflict between the Declaration and the Constitution as interpreted by the Federalists and Anti Federalists? How much influenced by economics are these men? What is their view of human motives? How noble do they think people are? What do they think the role of virtue in a populace is? How does Madison justify the expansion of republican government? How are the Federalists connected to Paine? How are they connected to Calvinist New England? What is the role of reading primary sources as a student of American history? How are they related to the history? Why are these essays considered so important?

Reading 5, March 2, Stanley Elkins, Slavery

Does the date of publication of Elkins' book have anything to do with its bias? What do you think Elkins' politics are? What do you think of the black "personality type" he finds? What do you think of his use of social science? Is it like Erikson's? Was the South a Nazi society? How has Germany changed from the time of Hitler until today?

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Reading 6, March 16, Harry Jaffa, The Crisis of the House Divided

How does this book resemble or not resemble Morgan's biography? Fast's? Is Paine like Lincoln? Could someone criticize Jaffa as a philosopher and not a historian? How would you compare this book to Elkins'? What would the Federalists say about Elkins?

Reading 7, March 23, Robert Fogel, Railroads and American Economic Growth (Xerox, available at Campus Copy)

What is the thesis of this book? What is the point of "might-have" history? Is this economic history different from social science history? Think of the different kinds of history you have been reading, plain old history, biography, social science history, "might-have" history, primary sources, historical fiction. Does history have any center?

Reading 8, March 30, Richard Eutalain, ed. Does the Frontier Experience Make America Exceptional? 17-71, 87-128.

What are Turner's basic ideas? What does he think are the motivating forces in American history? What would he make of Morgan's or Fast's views? How important is politics for each of them? How does politics fit into the explanations they have of American history? Would Turner pay much attention to the Federalists? If Turner is right, what is likely to happen after the Frontier closes? How important was slavery? Would he think the southerners were Nazis? Are his critics talking about the same thing that he is? What do they mean by Western History? What does he mean? Did he, for example, "overlook the ladies"? How are his views connected to Fogel's?

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Reading 9, April 6, Ruth Rosen, The Lost Sisterhood

How is this book like or unlike books like Morgan, Fast, and Jaffa, on the one hand, and those by Elkins and Fogel, on the other? Do you think prostitutes are deviants like witches? How is this book related to political history? Are historians like Morgan sexist?

Reading 10, April 13, Richard Hofstadter, The American Political Tradition

Why has this been one of the most influential books ever written in American history? Does it seem to you old-fashioned? What do you think of his interpretation of the Founding Fathers? Of Lincoln? What would Ruth Rosen say about this book? What would Jaffa say? How is this reading connected to Turner's work?

Reading 11, April 20, Elaine May, Homeward Bound

What is the connection of this book to Hofstadter's synthesis? Why is its perspective hostile to America? How is it like Rosen's book? What is women's history? Has May or Rosen "politicized" her treatment of events? Would Erikson like this book?

Reading 12, April 27, John Updike, Memoirs of the Ford Administration

Could you use Updike like Fast? What is Updike getting at in this book? What is his point about the 1970s? And about the 1850s? Is Updike a good historian of the 1850s? How is he like Hofstadter? Does he think political history is important?

TIPS ON WRITING PAPERS

1. The expository papers you write in college should answer questions, the more definite and well-thought-out the better. The questions I have framed for each assignment are designed to organize your thoughts, but don't try to answer more than one. You may disregard all of them if you wish, and make up your own, focusing on some aspect of the readings that interests you: ask a specific question carefully. Do *not* write a "response" paper -- your stream-of-consciousness ideas about the text. Very few people are interested in such ideas, and I certainly am not. You want to construct an argument about some clearly defined problem or issue that the text you are reading takes up or exemplifies.

2. So... your paper should have an introductory paragraph, and three or four further paragraphs that make your main points. You should end with a conclusion, which briefly summarizes your ideas but goes beyond a summary with some final thoughts.

3. You should write with the goal of establishing your own voice. But that does not mean just giving your own opinions. Your own views *must* flow out of a gathering of the evidence from the texts and out of a coherent argument. The most difficult thing in writing is constructing a voice that is both solidly grounded, that is, based on information and reasoning; and that has its own authority.

4. Write in colloquial English. Use the active voice. Write with nouns and verbs. Adjectives and adverbs are not your friends. Don't try to write formal academic prose -- you can't and it is wretched anyway. Read your paper aloud to yourself. If it sounds weird when read aloud, it probably is weird. Find a good friend to tell you the truth about your prose, and not just to be supportive.

5. Write the paper as early as possible before it is due. Put it aside as long as possible. When you come back and edit, mistakes and awkward parts will stand out more clearly. If you write and edit the night before, you almost certainly will not write an outstanding paper.

6. I assume that you will write grammatically in complete sentences; and that you know how to spell. For spelling you need a dictionary or spell-check; for grammar you might pick up a simple hand-book. The mechanics are basic; if you have not mastered them, no one can understand your thought. Your ideas are of no interest, and are not even ideas, unless they can be formulated in proper English.

If you have real problems, I will read you the riot act and send you to the Writing Center; but beware -- their writing is pretty lousy, and you will ultimately have to do this on your own with regular practice. It is worth it -- an ability to write clearly and effectively will rank as a great achievement of your education.