HIST 377: Response Papers

Evaluation of historical sources and written communication are critical skills for the historian. Consequently, as part of this course, students will read, respond to and evaluate three different historical works. The papers for this course are designed to be short, but the required papers must be complete essays – introduction, body and conclusion. These will hone both the writing skills and critical thinking skills of the students.

There will be a total of seven short papers for this class. Each paper will be worth 150 points. All students must complete 5 of the 7 assigned papers. Students not completing at least four papers will automatically receive a failing grade in the course. Two paper grades will be dropped. Students may either take a pass or simply have the lowest two grades of the seven dropped. The day the papers are turned in, the class period will be devoted to a discussion of the topic. Papers are due at the beginning of the designated class period. All papers must use Terabian style footnotes, good grammar and style. Papers may be turned in either hard copy or electronic format, preferably both. NO LATE PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED.

Each paper must be a minimum of 3 pages and no longer than 5 pages. Page length does not guarantee a particular grade, but merely makes the paper acceptable. All papers must be in Times New Roman Font of either 10, 11 or 12 point size, double-spaced. Margins are to be only 1 inch on all sides. Title pages are fine, but any headings on page one that extend beyond name & Title of paper will be deducted from total length. Each paper must be submitted in both electronic (either MS Word or Word Perfect) and hard copy. Footnotes in Terabian style are to be used throughout, and good grammar and style is required. If you have trouble using apostrophes correctly, proofread your paper carefully.

Each paper should have a title other than the assignment number. This helps to focus your thoughts as a writer. You should have a thesis or main idea that is clear in your first paragraph. Your paper must include specific quotes and illustrations from the given work for that paper. Remember that you must support your thesis with specific evidence. Simple assertion does not necessarily prove an argument.

Assignments: More specifics and additional texts are provided on-line.

PAPER #1: Herodotus, The Histories Due: Feb. 5th
For the first paper, your will be reading the first great historian in the West, Herodotus. You are primarily responsible for Books I, II, & III, which are his account of the Persian Wars. Be sure to include as part of your analysis when, where & why Herodotus is writing, and what type of history he is writing. As you read, consider the strengths and weaknesses of this work. Be ready in class to discuss why he is the “Father of History”.

Choose and analyze one aspect of Herodotus’ account. For the paper, you should consider the role of women, freedom, his view of the Persians, the Athenians, the military, etc. Choose one aspect and consider what we can know as historians using Herodotus, as we often must, as our main source.

PAPER #2: Aristotle (?), The Athenian Constitution Due: Feb. 22nd
For this paper, students will once again be examining a primary source. The Athenian Constitution is a political treatise often attributed to Aristotle, though his authorship is problematic. For this paper, once again be sure to identify the context of the source, the author, the type of writing, and the purpose of author. For your topic, choose and analyze one aspect of the presentation of Athenian government. How did it work? How was the Athenian government presented here and why?

PAPER #3: Plutarch, Plutarch’s Lives Volume 2 Due: Mar. 1st
For the third paper, students will be examining a different type of history – biography. Plutarch wrote his original work to compare and contrast various significant figures from Greece and Rome. Your task for this paper is to read his life of Alexander the Great. Write an essay analyzing and identifying the major themes and characteristics of Alexander according to Plutarch. How might this influence writing later on? Why these themes?

PAPER #4: Plutarch, Plutarch’s Lives Volume 2 Due: Mar. 22nd
For paper #4, you will again be looking a Plutarch’s Lives. This time, however, students are to choose and read two different biographies by Plutarch. These may be two that Plutarch also directly compares, if you so choose, but at least one has to be Roman – and not Julius Caesar. Compare and contrast the two biographies, paying particular attention to the themes and characteristics of each person and the point Plutarch is attempting to make for
each. How might this influence our understanding of Rome?

PAPER #5: Plutarch, Plutarch’s Lives Volume 2 Due: Mar. 31
Caesar, The Civil War;
Suetonius, The Lives of the Caesars: The Deified Julius
http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/suetonius-julius.html

For paper #5, you will again be looking a Plutarch’s Lives, in addition to Caesar’s The Civil War, and Suetonius. For this paper, students will attempt to sort propaganda from truth by examining different accounts of the same person/ events. Read the material from Suetonius on-line, Plutarch’s Life of Caesar & Life of Pompey, and Caesar’s own account of the Civil War between himself and Pompey. Choose one aspect (event or person or characteristic of a person) which depicted in three of these. Analyze the differences and offer a conclusion as to what actually happened.

** This paper carries a +10 bonus (which will be incorporated into the grade for the paper) because of the degree of difficulty.

PAPER #6: Pliny the Younger, Letters Due: Apr. 14

For paper #6, students will be examining a different type of primary source – letters. Pliny the Younger came from a prominent Roman family and corresponded with a variety of people, including the historians Suetonius, and Tacitus, on a myriad of topics. Read these letters and choose one topic – the eruption of Vesuvius, the Christians, persecution, social customs, women, government, or the empire. Analyze the letters and examine what they tell us of Roman in the late first century. Remember to include context, type of source, author and purpose of writing. How are letters different from a history, biography or memoir?

PAPER #7: Early Christian Writings Due: Apr. 26

For paper #7, students will be examining a series of treatises which are often referred to as “the Apostolic Fathers.” These date from the Second and Third Centuries, but are not part of the New Testament Canon because of authorship being either too late or undetermined. However, these writings were well-known by Christians of the Second, Third and Fourth centuries. For this paper, choose one topic – church organization, the Old Testament, fellowship, sin, persecution, baptism, church and state, etc. – addressed in the letters and treatises in this short volume. Include context, as possible, for each author you use. Analyze what the issues and perspectives were for these Christians and what it tells us about this age.