History 2600 Winter 2007
GUIDELINES FOR WINTER TERM PAPER ASSIGNMENT

Your final paper assignment is meant to provide you with an opportunity to explore an historical question of particular interest to you. The only firm requirements are: the essay must be 10 pages in length; it must involve reading and/or research beyond the assigned course materials; the topic must be approved in advance by your tutorial leader; and your research notes and rough drafts must be turned in with your essay. Your paper topic and preliminary bibliography are due in tutorial the week of January 25. The outline is due the week of February 27. The paper itself (along with your notes and rough draft) is due in tutorial the week of March 13. Late papers without an extension from your tutorial leader will be penalized. Photocopied papers will not be accepted under any circumstances.

Historians care a great deal about writing, and your paper will be marked for logic, clarity, and neatness, as well as for content and quality (including the quality of your argument and the quality of your primary and secondary sources). Because it takes time to find a good topic, research it, and construct a convincing argument that is supported with evidence, you should allow plenty of time to write – and rewrite – your paper. Don't forget to number the pages, check for spelling errors and typos, and use proper methods of citation.

CHOOSING A TOPIC:
You may write on any topic approved by your TA, but your paper must have a clear thesis (argument) supported by examples and evidence from your reading. In other words, your paper should analyze –not just describe – its subject matter.

Several types of essays are appropriate for this assignment. The first explores a problem in historiography--an issue over which historians disagree--and attempts to review and evaluate the contending positions. You might, for example, discuss the debate over the origins of segregation or over the causes of the Civil War. Was American slavery the cause, or result, of racism? Did the founding fathers intend the Second Amendment to guarantee every individual the right to own a gun? Did the New Deal benefit ordinary Americans? Was World War II a watershed for American women? Other possible topics include the medicalization of birth; the historiography on immigration or slave resistance or civil rights; the origins of the Cold War; or American intervention in Vietnam. There are many possibilities. If you choose this kind of paper, it is important to make sure that the scholarly studies you assess are up-to-date. This is important because historical interpretations of issues like slavery and the Cold War have changed dramatically over time. Get an early start on your paper so that you can obtain the best books and articles on your subject.

A second type of essay uses both primary and secondary sources to understand an historical figure, development or event. For a paper on lynching, you could analyze both secondary sources (by Fitzhugh Brundage, Edward Ayers, etc.) and primary sources, such as exposés by Ida B. Wells. You may also evaluate the writings of, and scholarship

about, an important politician or social leader (such as Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Jefferson, Booker T. Washington, Margaret Sanger, Henry Ford, George

Kennan, Malcolm X, etc.). Alternatively, you could study a combination of primary sources (such as newspapers, popular magazines, published correspondence, and autobiographies) and secondary sources about a specific event, such as the dropping of the first atomic bomb over Hiroshima; the assassination of Martin Luther King, etc. A good paper would use your own interpretation of the primary sources to support or challenge what other historians have said on the topic.

A third kind of essay develops an argument from a close reading of a specific primary source (or set of primary sources). For example, you could examine several novels or autobiographies written by immigrants (or African-Americans) to assess the immigrant (or black) experience in America. Or you could study how advertisements in a magazine, such as Life, Ebony, or Ladies' Home Journal, changed over a ten or twenty year period. For such an essay to be successful, it must analyze as well as describe your sources. You might also choose use primary sources, such as newspaper or magazine articles, to learn more about an event (such as the first moon landing in 1969), that has not received a great deal of attention from historians.

COMPILING YOUR PRELIMINARY BIBLIOGRAPHY:
As stated above, your bibliography may consist of primary or secondary sources or a combination of the two. Primary sources (such as newspapers, diaries, films, autobiographies, etc.) were created during the period or by the person you are studying. Secondary sources are scholarly interpretations produced after the event. We strongly urge you to use secondary sources published relatively recently (eg after 1980) and primary sources produced before 1985. Depending on your topic and the types of sources you are working with, your bibliography should contain 4-5 books or the equivalent. (Count 3-4 articles as a book). It's a good idea to record all the bibliographic information and take notes when you first read a book or article. This will save you time later.

Your paper will be evaluated for the quality as well as the quantity of your sources. The Enduring Vision has suggestions for further reading at the end of each chapter. The major bibliographic source in U.S. history, America: History and Life, is available on-line through York University Libraries The microtext section of Scott Library houses many old newspapers and magazines. Primary sources are also available on the internet; some are available as "History Links" on the History 2600 website. Please use only reputable internet sources.

ANALYZING YOUR MATERIAL:
Refer to last term's handouts, "How to Analyze a Primary Source" and "How to Read a History Book (or Article)." Ask yourself about the type of work you are reading, the author's purpose in writing, and the intended audience. Look for the historian's bias (point of view) and remember to "read between the lines" when evaluating a website or primary source. You should develop your argument only after you have fully understood your reading. Make sure you have plenty of evidence to support your point.

STARTING TO WRITE :

Writing is communication, and the first step to good history-writing is to organize your thoughts. Think carefully about the organization of your paper so you don't ramble. Present your main points in a logical order. Most students find it useful to make an informal outline. Begin by listing the main points you want to make. (These can form the topic sentences of each paragraph.) Underneath each point, list the examples (evidence) that support it. Most good history papers follow an established structure:

Introduction. The introduction is the most important part of your paper. You should state your argument (thesis) in the first paragraph. Remember that a thesis is not merely a restatement or description of your topic, but a statement of your interpretation (conclusions) about that topic.

Body. In the body of your paper, provide evidence (concrete examples) to support your thesis and answer any objections that could be made to it. Each paragraph should begin with a topic sentence that states the paragraph's main idea. The other sentences in the paragraph should elaborate on that idea and/or back it up with concrete examples. The first and last sentences of paragraphs can be used for transitions. Good transition sentences are like a road map: they tell your readers where they have been and where they're heading now.

Conclusion. Your concluding paragraph should not summarize everything you have said in the body of the paper, but clarify the significance of your conclusions. Avoid introducing new ideas or information in the conclusion.

WRITE CLEARLY AND WELL:

The strongest papers present an argument using clear and simple language. Choose your words carefully, check your grammar, and:

* Avoid conversational language, slang and jargon
* Use tenses correctly
* Use gender-neutral language
* Avoid generalizations; use concrete examples
* Write in the active voice: "Truman ordered the bomb," not "The bomb was ordered by Truman."

USE QUOTATIONS WISELY:

A good history paper uses quotations effectively, but doesn't overuse them. Quotations should be brief and contain the exact words found in the original. Quotations of fewer than four lines should remain in the text and enclosed in quotation marks.

Quotations of four lines or more should be set off from the main text, single-spaced, reduced one font and indented. This is called a block quotation, and it does not require quotation marks. Don’t use too many block quotations.

There are two other general rules: (1) do not quote when you can paraphrase; and (2) use quotations to illustrate your point, not to make it for you. All quotations and references should be properly cited.

USE PROPER METHODS OF CITATION:

Everyone knows that copying a passage word for word is wrong, and that you need a footnote for a direct quotation. However, you should also be aware that (1) a paraphrased passage that too closely resembles the original is also plagiarism; and (2) you must provide a citation for all information or ideas derived from another source--even if you don't quote it directly. The best way to avoid plagiarism while paraphrasing is to close the book so you don't have the original in front of you. Describe the main point using your own words.

Most historians use the Chicago Manual of Style method of citation. Here are some examples:

** a book:

1. Molly Ladd-Taylor, Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare and the State, 1890-1930 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 5-6.

** an article in a book or anthology:

2. Wini Breines, "The 'Other" Fifties: Beats and Bad Girls," in Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Post-War America, 1945-1960, ed. Joanne Meyerowitz (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 382.

** an article from a scholarly or popular journal:

3. Michael A. Bellesiles, "The Origins of Gun Culture in the United States, 1760-1865" Journal of American History 83 (September 1996): 425-455.

** a document without an author from a larger collection:

4. "NSC 68: United States Objectives and Programs for National Security, 14 April 1950," in Containment: Documents on American Policy and Strategy, 1945-1950, eds. Thomas H. Etzold and John Lewis Gaddis (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 398.

** a newspaper or magazine article without an author:

5. "Mr. Truman Goes to Congress," New York Times, March 12, 1947, 24.

** an internet source (make sure you include the URL):

6.Robert Brigham, "The Wars for Vietnam," n.d. <http://www.vassar.edu/vietnam/index.html> (October 30, 1997).

For subsequent references to the same source, use the short title method: Ladd-Taylor, Mother-Work, 5-6 OR Breines, "The 'Other' Fifties," 382 OR "Mr. Truman Goes to Congress."

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

The bibliography lists every book, article, and other source you used in preparing your paper. It should be in alphabetical order and formatted like this:

Bellesiles, Michael A. "The Origins of Gun Culture in the United States, 1760-1865." Journal of American History 83 (September 1996): 425-455.

Breines, Wini. "The 'Other" Fifties: Beats and Bad Girls." In Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Post-War America, 1945-1960. Edited by Joanne Meyerowitz. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994.

Brigham, Robert. "The Wars for Vietnam." n.d. <http://www.vassar.edu/vietnam/index.html> (October 30, 1997).

Etzold, Thomas H. and John Lewis Gaddis, eds. Containment: Documents on American Policy and Strategy, 1945-1950. New York: Columbia University Press, 1978.

Ladd-Taylor, Molly. Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare and the State, 1890-1930. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994.

"Mr. Truman Goes to Congress." New York Times. March 12, 1947.