

## HST 1304 WORLD HISTORY I

### WRITING ASSIGNMENT: “Primary-Source Text Explication & Analysis”

Length: 1000 words or more: please word-process in twelve-point type, double-spaced with one-inch margins.

The Assignment is due on March 24 (rather than March 21). It will be returned on or before April 1 and may then be revised and resubmitted by April 30 (the last regular class meeting).

The **PSTA-Essay** is a longer, more-detailed version of the primary-source analyses given on the examinations for this course. These essays should follow the same basic patters:

- A) Describe the work itself (the larger work from which the quoted passage in the Andrea & Overfield reader comes), its genre, its basic ideas, and its historical context. That could encompass a lot of material and you must sometimes focus on keeping your summation of these things as lean as they need to be. (BTW, writing concisely is an important skill.)
- B) Describe the content/meaning of the passage and explain what part it is of the whole work.
- C) (*Here's the analysis part.*) Explain how the work fits in the historical context (that you set out briefly in Part A). One possibility here would be to explain why this was produced at this moment. “Why then?”

Another possibility would be to discuss the work as reflecting some development pattern, tracing how a particular idea in a particular work has developed out of other, earlier ideas that are present in other, earlier works and then going on to be developed further (not too far in the future!) in other, slightly-later works.

Another possibility would be to discuss an idea in a particular culture reflected in a particular work in conjunction with some other work that of that selfsame culture. Do the basic ideas that are reflected in two such works seem quite similar or different? If they are different, why are they different? Whether different or the same, can you describe aspects of the culture that are shaped or conditioned by this idea you have identified in this work?

I would suggest a rough division of the three parts to about 30% each for A & B, and 40% for C. But the exact division will vary, of course.

I encourage further investigation to learn about the work you choose to analyze and its particular context. The more you know about the work and its context, the easier it will be to find things to say about it. But take note that whatever work(s) you make use of in your essay, particularly if you adopt the ideas or the language of another scholar, must then be recognized appropriately through citation (footnotes or endnotes) and bibliography. You may use MLA or Chicago Style. Don't commit plagiarism.

The aim of this assignment is twofold: to develop further your facility interpreting primary-source texts in their historical context and to inculcate in you an appreciation for the usefulness of *erudition*. Erudition is what you have when you have “departed from not knowing.” Erudition encompasses knowledge and the capacity to use that knowledge skillfully.

We live in an increasingly vapid pop culture in which real learning and nuanced understanding is scorned in favor of what is "useful," "easy," and what follows one or another ideological line. I urge you to rise above the crowd in what you know, how much you learn, and in how effectively and entertainingly you can learn to wield what you know. As the philosopher Kant said, *Sapere Aude!* (“Dare to know!”) Learn a lot! Revel in what you learn! Strive to become known for knowing lots of things!

The focus of these papers are primary-source texts. A primary-source is an artifact, a witness, a window onto a particular time and another mind. Whatever anyone writes reflects various ideas, values, suppositions, accepted truths, etc. of that person and to some extent of her or his time. The goal of this assignment is to reveal some of those truths latent in the primary-source texts you have been assigned and to develop the skill of explaining how those ideas condition the meaning of the text.

You should be trying to squeeze as much meaning from a primary-source text as you can, to explicate it and to write a short coherent essay about it.