

AMERICAN HISTORY FINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Task

For your final research paper, you must select:

- a **general topic** in American history that interests you
- an important **historiographical theme, issue, trend, controversy** or **debate** that is fundamentally connected to the topic
- a specific **primary source** or **group of connected primary sources** that illuminates the above topic and historiographical issue it involves

How to Proceed

Spend the next several weeks thinking about what aspect of American history you would like to explore both in terms of the topic and historiographical issue. Are you interested in slavery, race, workers, the Revolution, the constitution, feminist movements, the market revolution, presidents, the supreme court, congress, a particular state at a particular time, industrialization, technological change, western expansion, farming and rural life, the Civil War, any war, corporations, reform, immigration, urbanization, New York City, worlds' fairs, amusement parks, family life, sexuality, childhood, financial panics, civil liberties, cultural movements like the Harlem Renaissance or Abstract Expressionism, the New Deal, the Cold War, the Civil Rights Movement, 1950s mass culture, youth in the Sixties, the Vietnam War, Watergate, just to name a few? There are obviously hundreds of topics to choose from. To begin exploring which topic you might want to select, you can examine your class notes, textbook, the web, and, most importantly, articles and books housed in the Trinity or New York Public library. This is **one of the few times** when using non-scholarly websites is appropriate for this assignment. But you should definitely go to **libraries** and **bookstores** and look at books on different periods and themes.

You should also talk to me.

Next, you'll narrow down your topic by connecting it to a **historiographical issue** that might be of interest to you. Any given topic might involve several but you should focus on one. For example, let's say you're interested in presidents. You need to select one to focus on—Andrew Jackson, for example. Finally, identify a specific aspect of his presidency—the transformation of executive power might be one theme or attitudes towards Native Americans might be another.

Now it's time to begin identifying **scholarly materials** to help you explore your topic and the historiographical issue that's at stake. You can locate scholarly articles via [JSTOR](#) and scholarly essays and books via [Google Books](#) and [Google Scholar](#). Use the [Scholarly Resources & Databases](#) links from the course website. Ask the librarians for help. Make certain that you find materials that are of the highest quality and are the most authoritative. Remember that though websites often put forward interesting analyses, their source or authority—and therefore their quality—is less easy to ascertain. Thus, you should refrain from relying upon materials from the web for anything more than giving you the most general context. [The exception is articles downloaded from JSTOR and other scholarly databases].

Once you have come up with a topic and a historiographical discussion surrounding it, you should begin thinking about which **primary sources** or **group of connected primary sources** will help you illuminate your discussion. Posted on the course website are a list of **possible sources** that can serve as the basis for your paper. As you can see from this list, sources have been considerably broadened beyond the written ones we have generally focused on. They also include paintings, sculpture, architecture, cartoons, movies, and musical compositions. Please note that the list represents options that are likely to be useful in support of your topic. In consultation with me, you can certainly select a primary source or sources not listed.

Schedule

1. By **February 10th**, submit to me the **topic** and the **historiographical issue** that you think you want to explore.
2. By **February 27th**, submit to me the **primary source** or **collection of primary sources** that you plan to use in your paper. If you have already located secondary sources, you can also submit a preliminary bibliography.
3. By **March 16th**, submit a paragraph or two in which you preliminarily describe **what's at stake in terms of the historiography** of your topic and how your primary source might help you illuminate your topic. For example, if you have selected the origins of the American Revolution as your topic, you might submit a paragraph that points out that there is a historiographic debate over whether the Revolution was caused by ideological as opposed to social and economic forces and that you plan to use Tom Paine's *Common Sense* to help you figure out which was most important. If you select the market revolution as your topic, you might write a paragraph discussing the differing scholarly understandings of the cultural transformation of the rural North using a 1820s map for the Erie Canal as your primary source. In addition, **attach a preliminary bibliography** of at least **two scholarly books** and **two scholarly articles**.

You must keep up with all of the assignments—All Assignments must be typed.

Failure to submit any assignment in a timely fashion will also adversely affect your final paper grade.

4. By **April 16th**, write a paragraph **summarizing the substance of the primary source's contents and the conditions of its production**. By conditions of production, I mean include information about who wrote, painted, designed, conducted, directed, or participated in making the source, where and when it was presented, published, produced, and completed. If you use a visual source, like a painting or a cartoon, supply a copy—if possible—with your paragraph (xeroxed from a reproduction in a book, for example). In addition, **attach a revised bibliography**.
5. By **May 7th**, submit an **introductory paragraph** including a preliminary **thesis** and a **detailed outline** along with the latest **bibliography**.
6. By the due date during the final examination period in June, **submit** a paper that is **no less** than 9-page, double-spaced in a standard 12-point font, not including footnotes or endnotes. The paper should include a bibliography of sources consulted, even if not directly cited.
 - **Proper documentation and correct citation of primary sources and secondary literature is essential in either footnote or endnote form.**
 - **There are no extensions. Late papers will be marked down one full grade each day.**

Paper Checklist

- 1) Does the paper provide an **introduction** that engages the reader, a **thesis statement that is clear**, and a brief “**sense**” of how you are going to proceed? [Remember that your introduction can be as long as 3 paragraphs.]
- 2) Consistently ask yourself: “What’s the paper’s thesis? Is it precise? Does it make sense?”
- 3) Does each paragraph **support** your thesis or discuss counterevidence that might potentially undermine your thesis?
- 4) Have you fully integrated your **primary source(s)** into your paper?
- 5) Have you used at least **three scholarly books** and **three scholarly articles** (this is the bare minimum—more would be even better) to contextualize your discussion and to engage with a relevant historiographical issue raised by your topic? [Check with me if you are uncertain as to whether the books and articles you have selected meet these criteria.]
- 6) Have you avoided citing websites that are not scholarly in nature and, thus, not verifiable as to the information they put forward—this includes **Wikipedia**.
- 7) Have you used quotations appropriately?
 - a. Generally **do not** quote from the **scholarly literature** but instead put the quotation in your own words.
 - b. **Refrain** from using large block quotations unless you are going to specifically analyze the passage.
 - c. If you do choose to quote, then **identify who it was who wrote or said the words** you have chosen to quote in the sentence.
- 8) Does the paper have a conclusion that does more than merely restate the thesis? If not, think about what would make for an appropriate conclusion.
- 9) Have you appropriately **cited** the sources you used and placed the citations as either **endnotes** or **footnotes** according to the *Chicago Manual of Style* and have you included a bibliography of works consulted?
- 10) Have you used a **standard font 12-point font**?
- 11) Do you have **one-inch margins** all around?
- 12) Is your paper **double-spaced**?
- 13) Have you included page **numbers**?
- 14) Have you avoided using the **passive** voice?
- 15) Have you avoided the **first person plural**—that is “we,” “our,” and “us”?
- 16) Have you found appropriate **replacement words** for “said” and “felt”?
- 17) Have you written the paper in the **correct tense** (generally the past tense) and been consistent in your use of tense?
- 18) Have you refrained from using **colloquial** language and too many **contractions**?
- 19) Have you read your paper **aloud** and corrected any sentences that were difficult to speak?
- 20) Have you **proofread** the final draft of your paper at least **4 times**?
- 21) Have you **stapled** your paper?
- 22) Have you included a **cover page**?